

---

This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google™ books

<https://books.google.com>











# THE RED CIRCLE

BY

GERARD A. REYNOLDS

P. J. KENEDY & SONS  
NEW YORK CITY

**Copyright, 1915, by  
P. J. KENEDY & SONS, NEW YORK**

**Printed in U. S. A.**

## P R E F A C E

THE scene of this story is laid in the interior of China during the "Boxer" troubles of 1900. To name as its scene any real place where Europeans are to be found in China would be to invite attempts to identify the actors in the narrative with real persons; for it is not a very difficult matter to turn to various directories that contain the names of the few white folk who composed the scattered colonies of foreigners in the interior of China at this date. The author, therefore, while endeavoring to describe characters that are typical and true to reality, has avoided any misleading attempts at identification with living individuals, by laying the scene in an imaginary place—a trading-town on the upper Yang-tse, above the point to which navigation was open to foreign vessels at the time of the Boxer movement. The town of "Cheng-foo," with its local interests and politics, is meant to present a picture of what was the state of things in many Chinese towns in the troubled year 1900. But the events and the persons are, of course, fictitious. If by chance a name occurs of some European or American who was then on the upper Yang-tse, it is an unintended coincidence. The author hopes that no critic will quarrel with him for having taken a pioneering steamer farther up the great river than ships of the kind had in fact penetrated in 1900.



## CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	ON THE YANG-TSE RIVER . . . . .	1
II.	AN ENGLISH HOME IN THE FAR EAST . . . . .	12
III.	A MISUNDERSTANDING . . . . .	23
IV.	A WARNING FROM THE RED CIRCLE . . . . .	36
V.	A NIGHT OF ALARMS . . . . .	49
VI.	THE FATE OF LI-TSU . . . . .	62
VII.	CAPTAIN MARKER'S PLANS . . . . .	73
VIII.	PREPARING FOR THE STORM . . . . .	85
IX.	AT THE MISSION STATION . . . . .	97
X.	AT SHANGHAI JACK'S HOTEL . . . . .	108
XI.	WHAT DE VISSER EXPLAINED TO CAPTAIN MARKER . . . . .	120
XII.	ON BOARD THE "TAI-SHAN" . . . . .	132
XIII.	THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER . . . . .	146
XIV.	THE NEW CHRISTIANS . . . . .	160
XV.	A POLITIC RULER . . . . .	171
XVI.	DOWN THE YANG-TSE . . . . .	182
XVII.	"TO THE RESCUE!" . . . . .	195
XVIII.	IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS . . . . .	206
XIX.	THE GOOD SHEPHERD . . . . .	218
XX.	TROPHIES OF VICTORY . . . . .	232
XXI.	ON THE VERGE OF A DECISION . . . . .	245
XXII.	THE DECISION . . . . .	256
XXIII.	NEW TROUBLES . . . . .	264
XXIV.	AN UNEXPECTED SOLUTION . . . . .	276
XXV.	A CASTLE IN THE AIR . . . . .	285
XXVI.	A MESSAGE IN THE NIGHT . . . . .	297
XXVII.	SUNSHINE AFTER STORM . . . . .	310



# THE RED CIRCLE



# THE RED CIRCLE

## CHAPTER I

### ON THE YANG-TSE RIVER

CAPTAIN JOHN MARKER, dressed in white from his pith helmet down to his canvas shoes, sat in a wide-armed bamboo chair under the awning of the stern-wheeler *Tai-shan*, the little trading-steamer which for two years had been working on the upper reaches of the Yang-tse River. Marker was a pioneer, the first to open regular trade on the great waterway far above I-chang and Hankow. He had staked all he had on the venture, and he was chief owner of the steamer he commanded.

On another deck-chair beside him, James MacMurdo, his partner, the chief, and indeed sole, engineer of the *Tai-shan*, stretched his six feet of length. A powerfully built, sandy-bearded Scot was MacMurdo, dressed in white, but not the same spotless white the Captain wore; for there were oil stains here and there. He had taken off his cap and was mopping his forehead. He had just come

## THE RED CIRCLE

up from his engine-room, and he looked hot and tired; for, though the *Tai-shan* lay at anchor, he had been at work all the afternoon, and the weather was decidedly warm.

There was a steamy mist on the broad river, across which the last barge-load of the *Tai-shan*'s miscellaneous cargo was drifting toward the town, or riverside city, of Cheng-foo. The crowd of brightly colored junks along the water front, the white houses with their tiled roofs, the tall pagoda of the local temple—all looked blurred in the haze of heat that played fantastic tricks with the outlines of the low hills beyond and the far-off mountains of Sze-chuan.

"Hot enough to-day, Mac," said the Captain, "even when one takes it easy. I don't know how you feel. Have a soda with something in it?" And he pointed to the little cane-work table beside him.

"Aye, it's a wee bit hot," said MacMurdo, in his quiet, drawling voice. "One would think our boilers would never cool. It's lively in the engine-room, now that the ventilating-fans are stopped. I've had the piston out of the low-pressure cylinder, and packed it all snug. 'Twas high time it was done. We were wasting a lot of power on the run up. Had to do most of it myself. The boys are willing, but they aren't up to much. I've stripped the main bearings, and will overhaul them in the morning. There's not too much room for getting at things. Our engine-room ain't quite as big as it is in a Cunarder." And MacMurdo, as he talked,

## ON THE YANG-TSE RIVER

set the soda-water fizzing from a siphon into a long tumbler a quarter filled with brandy.

"That's where a man of your knowledge ought to be," suggested the Captain, "instead of knocking about this old river in a kind of overgrown steam-launch. Confess, Mac, you're sorry you didn't stick to it, and be chief engineer of a swagger liner by now."

"Well, man, I'm chief here. This is my little pond and I'm the biggest frog in it. I never was quiet and even-tempered enough to knock under to another chap in a big engine-room; and even if I were chief on a liner, I'd worry over bossing a lot of young fellows in gold-lace caps that think their college education has made them scientific geniuses. I don't want to kotow to a captain who, when he gets up on his high bridge, thinks he's a kind of admiral. I couldn't do the polite among the swell passengers, and I hate red tape and routine and fuss of all kinds. I'd rather be the combined captain and deck-hand on a ferryboat than be bossed about by a mob of swells on a twenty-thousand-ton liner. That's the truth."

"But you never mind my bossing you about, Mac?"

"No, not a bit. You and I get on nicely. 'First chop,' as the boys say. I run my end of the show as I like. Then the money's good. There's my share of the trade piling up in the bank at Shanghai, and very little temptation to spend the 'bawbees' in those heaven-forsaken holes up-river. I'll draw the cash some day, and go home

## THE RED CIRCLE

and marry and settle down somewhere on the Clyde."

"Dull place, the Clyde," said Marker, with a smile. "Not a patch on the grand old Yang-tse."

"The Clyde and the Yang-tse!" said Mac-Murdo, gravely, pausing in the operation of filling his pipe from his pouch. "My conscience, man, why try to compare them? The Clyde is the grandest river on earth—Glasgow city, and the miles of ships, and the big yards where the riveters' hammers are always going (it's like music if you're not too near them); and the cruisers and liners growing up and slipping one by one into the water as the launching day comes round; and then old Dumbarton Castle on its rock; and Balloch up behind it, with the Highland lochs and hills; and away down-river the Kyles of Bute and Arran in a few hours' run. Why did I ever leave all this for this cursed heathen land of heat and filth is more than I can say or guess!"

"You Scots are like the Irish," said Marker: "always dreaming of the old country. I shall be sorry to part, Mac; but, if we do as well as we've been doing, you'll soon have enough money to go back. We English are different, and I had not so much luck or happiness in England that I should ever care to see it again. I'll settle down in China. Shanghai will be good enough for me, when you set up housekeeping with some Scottish lassie down by old Dumbarton, with your house on the shore and your yacht on the river. Here's

## ON THE YANG-TSE RIVER

good luck to the future Mrs. MacMurdo!" And he raised his glass.

"And here's the same to the future Mrs. Marker!" said the engineer, following his example, and nodding toward the town. "And, if I might make a bit of a friendly conjecture, I would be fairly sure that she's not just that far off, either in time or place, as the Mrs. MacMurdo that is to be."

Marker became suddenly silent and thoughtful, staring at the river.

"I suppose we shall go to see her this evening," MacMurdo continued, with a quiet smile. "It's a blessing to have a house to go to, where one meets white folk again, and good women—quite apart from all that concerns my friendly interest in yourself."

Marker turned in his chair and faced him.

"Don't be in a hurry, Mac. Don't jump at conclusions. I don't mind saying that I think a lot of Miss Kirby and her sister; and the parson is a good sort, too; though parsons are not much in my line. But I must have more money in the bank before I think of marrying either Miss Kirby or any one else, and I'm not going to rush things for a while."

"Well, we won't talk any more about it, old man. Perhaps it's better not to plan too much. It's my philosophy that things shape themselves a good deal. What is to be, will be. We drift a lot in life, even when we think we are steering a course of our own. But I must not start lecturing.

## THE RED CIRCLE

If we are to go up to the manse, it's about time to change and go ashore for dinner. The boys have knocked off and are cooking, and that makes me feel a bit hungry. Better dine at Shanghai Jack's one-horse show of a hotel than worry about dinner here on board."

"Yes. Get ready, and I'll go with you to the hotel. We can dine with the Belgians. I've promised to take them up to the parsonage afterward. The ladies will give us some music, and you can talk philosophy with the Padre or play with the youngsters. You can send your boys ashore. They have had a hard day. I'll tell the boatswain to let some of his fellows off, and have our boat waiting for us at the bund at half past ten. That's late enough."

The two men rose. Marker walked forward till he could see below on the main deck a score of Chinese "boys"—Shanghai and Hong-Kong sailors and stokers squatted round two large bowls of rice and mince-meat. They were deftly performing what for Europeans is almost a conjuring trick—namely, the rapid conveyance of rice and meat to their mouths with a pair of slender "chop-sticks" instead of fork and spoon.

"Li-hang, come topside, chop-chop!" the Captain called out—an order in "pidgion-English" for the boatswain or foreman of his "boys" to come at once to the upper deck.

The man ran up the ladder, saluted, and stood like a statue, waiting with silent, expressionless face for his orders for the evening. They were

## ON THE YANG-TSE RIVER

given in the strange mixture of broken English and Chinese that is the *lingua franca* of Eastern trade —leave for the evening for so many of the men; a bright lookout to be kept against river thieves; the boat to be ready to put the European officers ashore in half an hour, and to wait for them again at the bund, or wharf, of Cheng-foo at half past ten.

A bath and a fresh cool suit of clothes soon made Marker and MacMurdo forget the heat of the day. There was a touch of dandyism about them as they took their places in the boat. White drill suits with gilt anchor buttons, white caps with gold braid and an anchor badge, and shining brown boots made up an effective costume. The sun was low between the bold scarped hills that seemed to close in the river up-stream; the air was clear; there was a breeze on the water; and there was a sense of rest in the general absence of noise and movement, for all work had stopped for the day. Flights of birds, among them a string of long-legged cranes, were wheeling over the water or flying high across the blue arch of the sky.

A gap in the line of junks moored along the riverside by the town showed the wharf, of blackened timbers trellised with greenweed; and beyond, the wide veranda of Shanghai Jack's hotel. It was not only a hotel, but a store; for Shanghai Jack, as the Europeans called him, was an enterprising Chinaman, who had established himself at Cheng-foo to take advantage of the opening of trade. He was a storekeeper, merchant, hotel-keeper, and even banker and money-

## THE RED CIRCLE

lender. Rumor said he was doing well and would soon be on the fair way to a great fortune.

He had come from Shanghai, where he had grown up among the Europeans of the international colony there. He spoke French and English, and he was now rejoicing greatly in the prospect of coming prosperity for Cheng-foo town and the whole province of Sze-chuan; for when the *Tai-shan* arrived three days ago, she had brought as passengers two Belgian engineers. They had come to make the surveys for a railway that was to start from the town and open up the hinterland of the province. They had been busy unpacking mysterious instruments of shining brass from big cases, and organizing a drawing-office in one of the rooms of his "hotel." They were now sitting smoking together at a little table under the veranda, waiting for their friends from the steamer, who were to dine with them.

The two Belgians had become fast friends on their voyage to China and during three months' preliminary training on the survey of the Hankow line. Both had learned English in their college days, but they had not yet picked up more than a few words of Chinese. Their native clerk was to be their interpreter when they were at work in the country, and work was to begin to-morrow. Friends as they were, there were as many points of difference as of contact between them. Jean de Visser, the senior of the two, was a Fleming from a village near Termonde, a student of the engineering faculty of Louvain. Jules Lebrun was a

## ON THE YANG-TSE RIVER

French Belgian, a Brussels man, trained in the University of that pleasant city. He had first made De Visser's acquaintance when they were both employed in the Cockerill Railway Works at Seraing, near Liège. But it was not till they were thrown together on the voyage to China that he had come to like the Fleming.

At first, indeed, he had felt some little contempt for De Visser. Jules Lebrun was a man of the city; he held what he considered the latest scientific views, and knew something of what he called "life." But De Visser was the son of a homely family of Flemish farmers—narrow-minded country folk, in Lebrun's judgment—and the young Fleming had been taught in that old-fashioned "clerical" University at Louvain, and worried about going to church on Sunday mornings instead of starting on the day's holiday at 7 A.M. Here, on the upper Yang-tse, thought Lebrun, the Sunday question would not divide them; though it was likely that even Sunday would not be a holiday.

Both of them liked Marker and MacMurdo. White men whose lot is cast in a strange Eastern land can become friends even in a few days' voyage, and the *Tai-shan* was their link with civilization. On the day of their arrival they had met another Englishman, the Rev. William Henderson, a medical missionary sent out by an English society. He had been four years in Cheng-foo, where his house, on the low ridge of the hill that looked down on the landward suburb of

## THE RED CIRCLE

the place, was an oasis of European peace, comfort, and cleanliness, amid the strange squalor of the Eastern town. His was an English home transplanted to the Far East, its inhabitants being the missionary, his wife, and her sister Edith Kirby, and two bright little children. There was a walled garden and a neatly paved compound, or courtyard, with the house and a small chapel on one side; on two others, various outbuildings, including the cottage hospital; and on the fourth side, a high boundary wall, with a gateway of brightly painted woodwork opening on the road, that ran down through the suburb into the town.

The Belgians sprang up from their chairs to welcome Marker and MacMurdo as they left their boat. Then the four men were soon seated at table under the veranda. Grave-looking Shanghai Jack waited personally on his guests, listening to their talk, without seeming to notice anything.

What strange folk, he thought, these Europeans were. They could not leave business aside even over their meals. Here was Lebrun asking MacMurdo if he could help him to repair the tripod of the theodolite, whatever that was—doubtless one of those magical instruments that he had helped his guests to unpack. There was Captain Marker pulling out his pocketbook, and telling De Visser there was no doubt about the longitude of Cheng-foo. He had figured it out by chronometer and solar altitude, taking as his starting-point the I-chang longitude as fixed by the naval survey. He would verify it, and fix the latitude carefully

## ON THE YANG-TSE RIVER

by observation, before he started again. What a curious language these white men were talking, with all these new words that he had never heard before! Shanghai Jack thought it a bit uncanny.

Dinner ended at last. Stretched in their cane arm-chairs, the four men smoked their cigars, and talked and laughed together. Shanghai Jack, hovering about, listened, but could not see the point of their jokes. At last they rose and walked away together. He concluded that they were on their way to the "English Padre's."

He slipped into his hotel, and reached a room at the back—a noisy room where a crowd, amongst whom were some of the *Tai-shan*'s men, were clustering like a swarm of bees round a table heaped with cowrie counters, and gambling away their brass perforated money. Shanghai Jack's partner kept the bank, and a fair percentage of the cash found its way into his strong-box—not mere brass tokens, but good silver dollars.

## CHAPTER II

### AN ENGLISH HOME IN THE FAR EAST

THE four Europeans made their way through the narrow streets of Cheng-foo, now half in dark shadow, half in silver light under the rising moon. The place was already settling down for the night. Dim paper lanterns shone here and there. A few stragglers passed them by, but they met more stray dogs than men. The place was not a walled town, but there was a barrier at its boundary closed after sunset. The Chinese watchman opened a wicket to let them pass into the straggling suburb, where the air was heavy with the smell of open drains by the roadside; and a straggling row of miserable, tumble-down hovels prolonged the town up the hillside, at the top of which they came to a clump of trees that overshadowed the gate of the mission station.

After the sights of the Chinese town, Mrs. Henderson's drawing-room seemed a paradise of light, order, and comfort. On the walls, tinted a light green, hung reproductions of famous works of art. The floor was covered with bright matting and scattered rugs. There were shaded lamps,

## AN ENGLISH HOME

easy-chairs, a tea service on a little table, a piano, and a heap of music on a cabinet beside it. A cool breeze came from the open garden windows, but a screen of gauze kept back the hosts of insects that were buzzing outside.

Mr. Henderson was in white, like his guests; but the dresses of the ladies, his wife and sister, gave a touch of color. It was pleasant to see their smiling faces and listen to their frank words of welcome; pleasant, too, to hear the glad laugh of the two children, little Herbert and Ida. They were just being sent off to bed; but they came rushing back, and made straight for tall MacMurdo. They struggled up to plunge their hands into his pockets; and, sure enough, there were two packages of sweets there. MacMurdo was an old friend of the little ones.

Lebrun and De Visser were introduced, and over the teacups there was much talk about the new railway. Mr. Henderson expressed a hope that there would be no trouble with the country people.

"You know the difficulty," he said. "The Chinese have no cemeteries. They bury their dead by the roadside, in a garden, at the corner of a field. The whole country is a scattered graveyard, and the graves are as sacred as the temples. We in Europe would not like a new line to be run through the parish churchyard."

Marker explained that the young engineers were not quite new to China, for they had been on survey work near Hankow. Lebrun struck in with explanations:

## THE RED CIRCLE

"We don't expect trouble, at any rate at the commencement. We shall begin with a rough plane-table survey. It will look like sketching, and alarm no one. By the time we are ready to mark out the line the tao-tai [magistrate] will have explained matters to the people. We avoid places where there are many graves. If a grave cannot be avoided, well, there must be a solemn removal of the late lamented to another spot, with a fine monument, all at the company's charges, and gratifications, largesses for all who feel any trouble about it. You see it is expensive, but it must be done. We must respect even the absurd prejudices of the people, who for the rest are not unamiable. I find them good fellows if one takes them the right way."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mr. Lebrun," observed Henderson. "I don't like the idea some people have that we can ride roughshod over them, and that they are unworthy of common politeness and reasonable consideration. I have never any trouble with them, and I have many Chinese friends."

"You are their physician and their pastor," said De Visser; "so I suppose you have exceptional influence over many of them, and know them well."

"As to knowing them," said Henderson, thoughtfully, "I am never quite sure. The Chinese face is something of a mask to us Europeans. One does not easily see beyond it into the mind. There are hypocrites in all countries who try to gain what they can, and this mask of a face

## A N ENGLISH HOME

makes hypocrisy easy enough. But, then, some are grateful for what I do for them. Some come not only for bodily aid, but also to listen to my teaching. I think some are sincere. Many are doubtful. I am not an optimist like so many of my brethren. We are in the day of small beginnings, feeling our way in China. Only for my medical work, I could do little. That gives me a hold on them."

"Yes," interposed Lebrun, "that is surely the true way. Frankly, Monsieur le Pasteur, I think preaching to people so different from the European is a mistake. You do not mind my so free expression of my thoughts, sir?"

"Certainly not. I am always ready to learn," said Henderson, with a suspicion of a smile as he caught De Visser's eye.

"You are the true, the ideal missionary," continued Lebrun. "Pardon my saying it! Men will differ to the end of time as to the philosophy of being and the mysteries of the other world—if indeed there is anything beyond. But sickness and pain are realities, and you show them the power of civilized science and the beauty of a cultured life. Your skill as a physician, your kindness as their helper, appeal to them more than a thousand discourses; and the sight of gentle women working with you makes the appeal all the more invincible. Better far such a mission than the obsolete efforts of men who have forsaken all the sweet influences of a home to live in loneliness, talking about theological abstractions to poor fel-

## THE RED CIRCLE

lows who can't understand them. You, sir, are a missionary of progress and humanity. I am glad to meet you. It is an honor."

Lebrun had been a star of his university literary society. He loved to "perorate," and he was carried away by his own eloquence. De Visser exchanged more than one quiet smile with the missionary. The others were nearer the piano. MacMurdo, talking quietly with Mrs. Henderson, had stopped to listen to the speech; Marker and Edith were bending over the music, apparently occupied with it. Marker looked up at the Belgian, expressing his surprise with a low, almost inaudible, and quite unconscious whistle. MacMurdo spoke.

"There's much that's true, no doubt, in what you say, my young friend," he began, with an air of patronizing admonition; "but, after a hot day, I find it best not to agitate the mental faculties with abstruse subjects."

Henderson looked grave.

"Mr. MacMurdo is right," he said, gently. "No doubt my medical work is helpful in gaining the confidence of these poor people, and no doubt my wife and sister are useful allies. But pardon my saying—before we drop serious talk and have some music—that I should be sorry to be a mere missionary of science or a mere philanthropist. And I have known missionaries do good work without either medical knowledge or a home like mine. There is one in the town here. I don't agree with his views, but I respect him; and he has

## A N E N G L I S H H O M E

influence that is all his own over his people. Probably you have met him already and know who I mean—Père Gratien.”

De Visser’s face brightened.

“A Catholic missionary?” he asked. “I did not know there was one here.”

“You will know him soon,” said Henderson. “I am sure he will look you up at Shanghai Jack’s hotel, if only for the pleasure of talking French again with educated men. He speaks no English. He was here long before I came. He lives in the worst part of the town, in the middle of a lot of hovels. He dresses and looks like a Chinaman. He and I are good friends when we meet, but it is not often.”

“No doubt he is an excellent man according to his lights,” said Lebrun. “But that kind of missionary will soon be obsolete. The world needs men of science like yourself.”

“You flatter me,” replied Henderson; “but let us leave science and progress and have a song.”

There was more than one song. Edith led off with a simple English ballad. Lebrun volunteered to sing a student song, which he did to his own great satisfaction. MacMurdo, not to be outdone, sang in broad Scots some verses of “Robbie Burns.” During the singing De Visser and the clergyman had slipped out of the room. Henderson had read in the young Fleming’s eyes that he wished to have a few words with him.

They sat in the missionary’s “work-shop,” which seemed a strange mixture of a clergyman’s

## THE RED CIRCLE

study and a doctor's consulting-room. On the shelves and the wide flat-topped desk medical treatises and works of English divinity jostled each other. A Chinese dictionary propped up a Bible, and a stethoscope lay in the opening leaves of the latter volume.

Henderson pushed a box of cigars toward the Belgian. "We can smoke while we talk," he said.

From the next room came the notes of the piano and the deep voice of MacMurdo.

"I hope my friend has not offended you," De Visser began. "I should be sorry. He is young, and will drop all this student talk as he grows older."

Henderson looked amused at De Visser's assumption of riper wisdom.

"No," he replied, "I am sorry for some things he said, but I do not see any offense to myself in them. I can say that when he has touches of gray in his hair, as I have, he will probably speak with more caution and think more reverently. You are older, I am told, but it cannot be by many months or years."

"I have old views, in any case," De Visser explained, as if excusing his attitude of a critic of the other man—"ideas nearly nineteen hundred years old. I am of Père Gratien's faith, and I want you to put me in touch with him and tell me where to find him."

The missionary looked pleased.

"I feared," he said, "that you might be of your comrade's way of thinking. I imagined most Con-

## AN ENGLISH HOME

tinental men belonging to scientific professions thought very little of this good book" (and he laid his hand on the Bible). "I am glad you hold the faith once delivered to the saints, even though we differ as to points of form and detail. You will make Père Gratien happy. He is a good man. I honor him, though in many things I cannot agree with him. See here! I will show you where he lives." And he opened an outline map of Cheng-foo and pointed out the bund, the hotel, the main street of shops, the magistrate's yamen opening on it, the Catholic mission-house in a network of lanes at the east end of the town.

"I shall go there to-morrow afternoon. I shall be busy all the morning starting the survey," said De Visser.

There was a tap at the door, and MacMurdo's red-bearded face peeped in.

"I'm not stopping a confeedential consultation, I hope," he said; "but, man, I'm dying for a weed and a soda."

"Come in!" responded the clergyman, cheerily. "There are no secrets here. I am teaching Monsieur de Visser his way round our beautiful town of Cheng-foo. Find a chair there. Throw the books off it. Here are the Manilas, and I think I have a siphon and something to qualify it with. You deserve a drink for your song. Why does not the Captain come in?"

"Bless you, he won't come to-night! Mr. Lebrun is making good Miss Kirby improvise an accompaniment for another of his student songs.

## THE RED CIRCLE

You can hear her striking the chords while he hums it. Marker is just glowering at him, and Mrs. Henderson looks as if she thought it as good as a play. There they go. She has got the tune at last."

The song began. MacMurdo mixed his brandy and soda. Henderson offered a glass to De Visser, who hesitated. MacMurdo pushed it aside.

"I take the preeveleeg of age and experience," he said, "when I advise our young friend here not to follow my own example. Tea, though not so agreeable, is a healthier beverage than qualified soda in this unfortunate climate."

"But you take the *eau-de-vie* yourself," objected De Visser.

"Yes, that is so. But, you see, I am a hardened practitioner. The process of hardening is a dangerous experiment not to be lightly undertaken. I have survived it. I am safe—acclimatized. With some men it ends otherwise; and our reverend friend here, or one of his brethren, is called in, first to attempt a scientific cure, and then to read the burial service. I like you, De Visser. That's why, on the whole, I'd rather drink your share of the brandy and water and keep you out of mischief, than run the risk of attending your funeral."

"Mr. MacMurdo's preaching is sounder than his practice," said Henderson. "My own experience satisfies me that one can live very well in this hot country without brandy and soda. I never touch it myself."

## AN ENGLISH HOME

"No," said MacMurdo; "but you keep it for exceptional cases, like my own. There, the song is over! The Captain will be moving soon, for our boat is at the bund at half past ten. It's pleasant here, but we must all be going, I misdoubt."

It was so. Edith came in with a message from Marker, and shook her finger warningly at MacMurdo as he raised his glass and drank to her health.

"I hope this wicked man has not been leading you into bad habits, Mr. de Visser," she said, smilingly.

"No, Mademoiselle. He has been giving me much good advice."

At parting, Lebrun was effusive in his expression of thanks for the pleasant evening he had passed. De Visser, less expansive in his manner, said he felt as if he had been for a short time back in old Europe.

"You must come often," said Mrs. Henderson.

"Come to-morrow evening," added the clergyman, "and dine with us, and tell us how your work has started." He insisted on sending a servant to accompany them into the town.

"What kind people they are at the *pasteur's* house!" said De Visser, as he bade good-by to his sailor friends on the wharf.

"*Et cette jeune demoiselle, Mees Kirby—c'est un ange!*" said Lebrun, half talking to himself.

"Confound those foreigners!" muttered Marker under his breath, as the boat shoved off into the

## THE RED CIRCLE

moonlit expanse of the Yang-tse. He knew no French, but he had caught the name of "Mees Kirby."

"They're veery good boys," MacMurdo put in, apologetically. "They have a lot to learn yet. That dark chap Lebrun is a bit daft in his talk, but I dare say I myself talked a lot of nonsense when I was his age. The fair one is more level-headed, I should say. Good luck to them both! It's a fine thing to be young with all one's troubles before one—that it is!"

. . . . .

The boat slipped into the shadow of the *Tai-shan* and the two men clambered on board. Marker went off to his cabin without another word. MacMurdo stood for a moment on the deck and looked up the long shining reach of the river.

"The Captain is a bit younger still than I thought," he said to himself, "or he wouldn't fash himself about that boy being so happy at seeing a white woman again. It's a pity when a grown man has not a little more philosophy in his composition. It saves one a lot of trouble."

And with this reflection he, too, disappeared into his cabin. Only the Chinese watchman paced the deck noiselessly in his straw-plaited shoes.

## CHAPTER III

### A MISUNDERSTANDING

AT seven o'clock next morning the survey party started from Shanghai Jack's hotel for its first day's work. At the yamen, or official residence of the portly gentleman who held the post of tao-tai, or magistrate and governor of Cheng-foo, and at other places of public resort in the town, had been posted a proclamation warning all whom it might concern that the Europeans were not to be molested or obstructed in their work, which was being done by the order of the Emperor, the Son of Heaven, for the benefit of all his good subjects of the town of Cheng-foo, and the province and the Empire generally. Terrible penalties were threatened against all who might neglect this order.

As a further precaution, one of the guards of the yamen accompanied the party. He was a smiling, good-humored-looking man, whose stout person told more of high living than hard exercise. On the breast of his blue robe was sewn a round patch of white stuff inscribed with characters denoting his official position, and it stood out like a bull's-

## THE RED CIRCLE

eye on a target. He had a copy of the proclamation stuck in a roll in his girdle, and to support this written authority he carried a formidable club.

Under his protection went the two Belgians, in an easy white working-kit and sun helmets. They were followed by their native clerk, who also acted as their interpreter; and by a porter, who carried the plane-table and its tripod stand, a surveyor's chain, and a bundle of canes with little red flags attached to them, to mark out points in the survey not defined by some existing object. Men and women stared at them. Boys, always ready for a new excitement, followed them till warned off and threatened by the escort. They passed out of the town and up the hill by the English mission station.

"We shall see her again to-night," said Lebrun half to himself, half to his friend, as they passed the house. The more phlegmatic and practical Fleming replied with a remark that there was a lot to be done before they could think of the evening's recreation.

He was in command of the party, and he went more than half a mile beyond the house before he halted. There the road, a narrow causeway of flat, ill-jointed stones, after a slight descent from the hilltop and a sharp turn, ran fairly level and quite straight for a mile to the eastward. It was slightly above the millet-fields on each side, from which it was separated by open ditches. Here and there a side road, little better than a beaten footpath, led to an isolated farm. Farther

## A MISUNDERSTANDING

off, the tall pagoda of a village rose from a clump of trees.

"We can make the start here for our first rough survey," said De Visser. "I think we had better measure off a short base—say a kilometer—along the road, and then lay off some leading points from the end stations. We can set the table here, and I will start the drawing. You will take the clerk with you and measure off the base-line."

"*Parfaitement*—quite so!" said Lebrun, who had rolled and lighted a cigarette.

The native assistant was already setting up the plane-table, and De Visser took out the compass needle in its long narrow case and laid it, with his pencils, on the paper. The table had been set on its tripod on a broad stone beside the road. De Visser drove one of the canes with its fluttering red flag into the ground beside the stone. Lebrun took the chain, and from this mark began to measure forward along the road, with the help of the trained native clerk. The envoy of the yamen went with them, marching a little in advance of the leading man, and turning to stare at the strange operations of the white surveyor.

De Visser was left alone with the porter, who squatted by the roadside and began to doze. The Fleming was smoking the comforting cigarette, while he took sights on every prominent object in view, and marked off their exact directions with lightly ruled pencil lines and brief notes.

He was so absorbed in his work that he hardly noticed that first two, then half a dozen more, of

## THE RED CIRCLE

the peasants who were working in the fields were coming toward him. He paid no attention to them until they gathered round him and unconsciously checked his progress by getting in front of him as he took a sight and obstructing his view of the object whose direction he wanted to fix. They were talking together, and staring wide-eyed at the spider's web of lines drawn on the paper, and the long needle flickering in its glass-topped case. Only when he had asked them in French to get out of the way, and then suddenly realized that he could not speak Chinese, and that the dozing porter was no interpreter, did he perceive the embarrassment of his position.

He had, however, fixed more than a dozen points already. This would do for a beginning. He folded up the table, shouldered it, shook up the sleepy porter, and began to stride after Lebrun, who had covered more than half the distance to be measured. The peasants followed him in a cluster, anxious to see more of these interesting and mysterious proceedings. One of them pulled up the cane and flag that marked the starting-point, waved it in the air, and then shouldered it as if he were a standard-bearer. The rest laughed with an amused chuckle of delight at the good joke.

De Visser, with a muttered exclamation of annoyance, handed his load to the porter, re-captured the little standard, and set it up again by the roadside. As he turned away, another mirthful Chinaman pulled it up and began strutting along the road, waving it bannerwise. It was

## A MISUNDERSTANDING

awkward not to be able to explain to these uninvited attendants of his work that they were a bit of a nuisance.

But De Visser was a cool-headed fellow, and saw that to insist on their giving up the flag again might lead to a quarrel. "One must be patient with children and fools," he said to himself; and he took out his knife, bent down, and scratched a triangle on the broad stone that marked the position of the table and the beginning of his base. Then he walked after Lebrun and his companions, preceded by the flag-bearer and surrounded by the rest of the country-folk. "It's a worry," he thought; "but what a comic picture it would be if one had a snapshot of it!"

He soon caught up with Lebrun; for not only was his comrade delayed by his chain-work, but the narrow road had been temporarily blocked by a creaking bullock cart, with solid wooden wheels, laden with vegetables for Cheng-foo market. The carter had developed a sudden interest in the proceedings of the helmeted men on the road, and had pulled his cart across it and walked on to have a closer look at Lebrun. The man from the yamen—the "gendarme," as the Belgians jokingly called him—was giving an explanation to the farmer, and had unrolled the proclamation. Half a dozen more peasants, with weeding-hoes in their hands, had come in from the fields and formed a listening group. De Visser's uninvited party joined them. The road was the scene of an improvised open-air meeting.

## THE RED CIRCLE

"Tell those jokers to clear the way and go about their confounded business," said Lebrun to the interpreter.

The standard-bearer had come up, and in a new fit of jesting began to wave his little red flag over Lebrun's head. The Brussels man had not the patience and coolness of his chief: he caught the cane and tried to jerk it out of the man's hands. It was an unlucky movement. The Chinaman, still holding the slender flagstaff with his left, caught Lebrun's wrist with his right. The two men were in a moment locked in a struggle; and, though the Belgian was wiry and athletic, the Chinaman was the stronger of the two. Lebrun felt that his wrist was being crushed in his adversary's grip, and that he was being pulled off his feet. But in his student days at Brussels he had been a votary of *Le Boxe*; and, getting his left hand free, shot it up with lightning swiftness, crash on to the point of his opponent's lower jaw. The Chinaman let go his hold and collapsed in a heap on the pavement.

Lebrun felt the momentary exultation of victory. De Visser was ready enough for a fight, if fight must be, but, less excitable than his friend, he saw at once the endless trouble that might be the outcome of a conflict with the people. It might wreck the whole enterprise on which they were engaged. But how was it to be averted now? There was the difficulty that he could not say a word to make the crowd understand him. He could only communicate with them through the

## A MISUNDERSTANDING

native clerk, who, he could see at a glance, was terrified by the very threat of a disturbance, and not likely to speak in a way that would impress the crowd with any other idea than that the white men were afraid of them.

The fallen man was being set on his feet by friends, and was staring about him in a half-dazed condition. The rest were vociferating unintelligible words, shaking their fists, flourishing hoes and forks—evidently working themselves up into riotous excitement in their anger at what they thought to be an attack on their leader. Others came running from the fields; and from the direction of the town two men came up and inquired of the countrymen what was the matter.

De Visser set his back against the cart, called Lebrun to stand near him, pulled the trembling interpreter to his side, and told him to make the tao-tai's man interfere and show the proclamation. Then he faced the semicircle of hostile men that closed in nearer to him. Looking over their heads, he could see that coming along the road from the town were two coolies, carrying a light palanquin, in which sat a man in a blue robe, with a bright button shining on the top of his round cap. It must be an official from the yamen, he thought; and he hoped that, if peace could be kept for a few minutes, the interference of the magistrate's representative would save the situation.

The gendarme had laid his club on the cart and was solemnly unfolding the proclamation. He

## THE RED CIRCLE

called for silence. But before he could get the crowd to listen to him, the man who had been knocked down had recovered from the shock, and with a yell rushed at Lebrun again. The Belgian met him with a blow from the shoulder that closed one of his eyes and sent him staggering back. His friends tried to rush in where he had failed. De Visser, ignorant of the art of *Le Boxe*, but a practised fencer and swordsman, caught up the club from the cart, parried a thrust made at his friend with a pitchfork, with a sharp tap on the head knocked down the man who held it, and then with a circling sweep of the weapon cleared a space and made the crowd shrink back. The interpreter had crept on all-fours under the cart. The gendarme had burst through the crowd and was running toward the town, calling out, as he went, that he was going for help.

The two Belgians were alone. Numbers were against them; but both thought only of making as good a fight as they could, and the attacking party felt a timid respect for their prowess. The crowd yelled, brandished their weapons, threw stones, but did not close. One of them, armed with a heavy hoe, crept round the cart and climbed upon it. The Europeans thought only of the crowd in front, and De Visser hardly realized what had happened when he heard a crash beside him and his friend collapsed at his feet, with his helmet smashed and blood flowing from his head. The man with the hoe had knocked Lebrun down from behind.

## A MISUNDERSTANDING

But the Fleming was a fierce, alert fighter, now that his blood was up. As the man on the cart leaned forward to make a stroke at him, he sprang on the wheel of the cart, and with a lightning sweep of the club sent him rolling off it. Then he dropped to the ground again just in time to stand over his fallen friend and use his weapon to parry several blows of sticks and forks. It had all taken only a few moments, and a few moments more must end the unequal fight. But there was help at hand.

The man in the palanquin had jumped out and run forward. De Visser saw him pulling back some of his assailants. He was talking to them in Chinese in short, sharp phrases of appeal or remonstrance. Some shrank back before him; others he hustled out of his way with an easy effort of what was evidently no uncommon strength of arm. In less time than it takes to tell he was beside De Visser, and astonished him by saying in French:

“Give me your stick or put it down. The fight is over. You are safe if you do what I tell you.”

De Visser threw the club down and faced the crowd, with his hands dropped at his side. He looked at the new-comer. The sun-tanned face, even with the long mustache trimmed in Chinese fashion, and the pointed beard, was that of a European. It must be Père Gratien.

The new-comer was speaking to the crowd. Only later De Visser learned what he said. He

## THE RED CIRCLE

was reminding them that they were disobeying the commands of the Emperor and the precepts of their own religion, which bade them be kind to strangers. If the white men had done any wrong, they would have to answer for it. But if they were injured, those who were guilty of attacking them would have to suffer for it. Let the crowd go away peacefully now; and he pledged his word that he would use his influence with the tao-tai to save any of them from being molested for what they had done already. "If you touch either of these men," he said, "you will have to kill me first. But if you take my advice, I will protect you."

"They began the fight," said one of the peasants, angrily.

"Well," answered Père Gratien, "if that is so, I will take them to the yamen. You shall go with me and tell the whole truth. If they are wrong, they will suffer. If you are mistaken in your charge, and it was you who began it, the tao-tai will be very severe in his sentence. Shall we go, or is it better to make peace? Decide quickly; for, see! there is the guard of the yamen coming over the hill."

He pointed to the turn of the road where it descended the slope of the long hill that shut out the view of the town. The sun flashed on the broad spears of a score of armed men from the yamen, whom the runaway gendarme was bringing to the rescue.

"It is peace," said one of the country-folk. "We

## A MISUNDERSTANDING

shall go away. We have your promise there shall be no pursuit?"

"Yes. Go at once—go quickly," said Père Gratien.

And the crowd dispersed.

De Visser grasped Père Gratien's hand.

"You have saved us," he said. "By what good luck did you come just at the right moment?"

"I came to see you at your lodgings," answered Père Gratien, "and I was told I would find you and your friend at work on the road. So I came on in my litter. It will serve now to take your wounded comrade back to my house. There is a short way across the fields over the hill on the right. We shall be quickly there."

He bent down and bandaged Lebrun's head with a handkerchief, called up his servants, and placed him on the litter. The soldiers had meanwhile come up. He vetoed any idea of their trying to make arrests, and told the leader of the party that he must simply escort him and the Belgians across the fields by the short way into the town. He promised to report to the tao-tai that the prompt arrival of the party had been of the utmost service, and added that he had given his word that there should be no pursuit of the peasants. He would arrange everything with the magistrate, and take care that the chief of the guard and his men were rewarded.

Matters having been thus settled, the party began its march toward the town by a beaten track through the fields and over the hill. Lebrun

## THE RED CIRCLE

was still insensible, but Père Gratien did not think there was more than a nasty scalp wound. Still, any wound in the head may prove dangerous. The sooner he was in a cool room at the Catholic mission station, the better.

The interpreter followed the party. He had recovered from his panic, and tried to persuade De Visser that he had taken refuge under the cart only in order to secure the surveying instruments in his charge from damage. "See, I have collected them all. Nothing is lost except a few of the arrows—the canes with the red flags."

De Visser told him he had something else to think of just then. He walked beside the litter, full of anxiety for his comrade. It was a relief when, as they passed through the narrow lanes of the town, they were in shadow from the fierce heat of the sun. It was still better when Lebrun showed signs of returning consciousness, and when at last he was dozing in a bed in Père Gratien's own room, with his wound dressed, and a native catechist, with some experience of sick nursing, sat beside him, fan in hand, keeping off the flies and maintaining a current of cool air.

In the next room Père Gratien and De Visser talked together. The Fleming was telling the priest all that had happened, in order that he might draw up his report to the tao-tai. Both agreed that, so far as possible, the affair should be hushed up. The missionary would try to persuade the magistrate that an amnesty was the best course; for it would be no gain to have a

## A MISUNDERSTANDING

blood feud between the survey party and the peasants.

After the conference Père Gratien went to see his patient again. When he came back to De Visser he looked anxious.

"I do not feel quite happy about our friend," he said. "He is duller than I like. It is not sleep now, but a kind of return of unconsciousness. It may not be so small a matter as we think. There may be depression of the bone of the skull and a lesion of the brain. I am not a skilled practitioner. Perhaps it would be best to ask the *pasteur*, Monsieur Henderson, to come to see him. He is an expert physician and surgeon."

"I know him already. He is a kind man and will be glad to come," said De Visser. "I will take your message to him."

So while Père Gratien wrote his report for the tao-tai, De Visser went to the English house on the hill to ask Henderson to come to a consultation at the Catholic mission station, and at the same time to tell the true story of what had happened. The Hendersons and Miss Kirby were relieved from a great anxiety by the news; for the report had just reached them that the two Belgians had been murdered by a mob of armed men.

## CHAPTER IV

### A WARNING FROM THE RED CIRCLE

THE Catholic, or (as it was locally called) the French, mission station of Cheng-foo was in the midst of the workingmen's quarter of the town. It was surrounded by a high wall of sun-dried bricks in which two gateways were pierced. One opened on a small paved courtyard, two sides of which were formed by the buildings of the house—edifices that were thoroughly Chinese in appearance, with their roofs of bright-yellow tiles, their quaint painted cornices of carved wood, and their windows filled with oiled paper. The rooms were furnished with an eye to strict necessity; and, like native rooms in the East, they had very little furniture in them.

In the missionary's workroom, and there only, one saw some indications that it belonged to a European. The writing-table had come from France, a present from an old college friend. On the wall above it hung some framed photographs. There was a picture of his old home—one of those comfortable country houses of Touraine that share the name of "château" with

## A WARNING

such stately neighbors as Pierrefonds or Chambord. Then there was a family group—father, mother, brothers, and sisters—with a young priest in his soutane standing among them. It was a souvenir of a happy holiday after his ordination. Then there were groups of students and professors, memorials of college days. The other decorations of the study walls were a large crucifix, oleographs of a Pietà and of the “Madonna di San Sisto,” and two large blue tablets bordered with gold and bearing Chinese inscriptions in gilt letters. These set forth, for the information of Chinamen, the missionary’s rank as the equal of a magistrate under the treaty between France and China for the protection of the missions.

In the rear of the house there was a tiny garden with a little fountain—a sanctuary where the birds knew they were safe and built their nests. Abutting on the house, and forming one side of both the courtyard in front and the garden behind it, was the church—a long, low building with a tiled roof, and a gilded cross at each gable end. The plainness of all the appointments of the house was compensated for by the display of color, gilding, and decoration in the church. To European eyes it might seem garish and overdone in its scheme of color, for crude reds and blues predominated. Strange, too, to the European visitor were the many pictures on the walls. Thus one showed a tall Chinaman in a flower-embroidered robe, embracing a ragged peasant in a tattered coat with a long pigtail hanging from

## THE RED CIRCLE

his head. It was an illustration of the story of the prodigal son reduced to Chinese conditions. And then there was the sower—a Chinese farmer scattering the good seed over a field that had a pagoda tower in the distance.

The church looked out upon a second courtyard, and its western door faced a gateway opening on the street; while the other side of this court was formed by the school-house, where little Chinese children sat in rows on the matted floor and a native catechist acted as schoolmaster. They said their lessons all together in a singsong drone; and the school was a noisy place when work was in full swing—silent only during the writing lesson, which took up a good part of the school time; for the Chinese school-boy has not a mere alphabet of twenty-six letters to learn, but hundreds on hundreds of characters to master.

Mr. Henderson had before this paid formal visits of courtesy to Père Gratien. He had tried to persuade him to come often to his own house on the hill; and had thought the Frenchman a little narrow-minded when he excused himself, pleading pressure of work and his habit of retiring early to rest. He guessed that really his Catholic colleague feared, perhaps, to give occasion to the people of the town to think that religions, the teachers of which were every-day friends, must, after all, be very much alike.

Henderson thought the illness of Lebrun would be a means of drawing the French missionary into more familiar relations. He was able to give

## A WARNING

Père Gratien a reassuring report of the case. He had ventured to offer to take medical charge of it and to call daily to see Lebrun, and the offer had been gratefully accepted. De Visser promised to come in the evening and bring news of the patient's progress.

When Henderson went home he told his wife and her sister that he thought that before long they would see more of the French Padre. "I shall be very glad," he said; "for, after all, we Europeans should stick together. I must try to make him get over his prejudices and come out of his shell."

That was an eventful day for the little European colony in the up-river town. And much more was to happen in the evening. The short tropical twilight was rapidly deepening into night. De Visser had dined with Père Gratien and was sitting by Lebrun's bedside. The priest was in his study, reading the daily Office from his Breviary, when the native catechist entered and told him that a man, who would not give his name, insisted on seeing him.

"I asked him to come to-morrow," explained the catechist, "but he says he can not come again, and that your Reverence will be sorry if he goes away without speech with you. I think it is Li-tsu. He is good for nothing. He came for a while to the church, then he went to the Bible class at the English mission, and after a time left them also. He works for a while on the river, and then gambles away his money at 'fan-tan'

## THE RED CIRCLE

or makes himself ill with opium-smoke. He is no good."

"Do not be so certain of that, my son," said Père Gratien, in a tone of friendly reproof. "Perhaps he has come to try to make a good beginning again. Let him enter. I shall see him here."

The catechist bowed and withdrew. As he walked along the tiled passage to the entrance-hall he said to himself, "No doubt he has lost his money and comes to beg for something, and pretends that he is thinking of coming back."

It proved to be Li-tsu, the scapegrace. He was comfortably dressed; but his haggard face, with the cheek-bones more prominent than nature had made them, and his sunken eyes, with deep furrows branching from the corners, told of the persistent opium-smoker. He had a nervous, hesitating manner. As the priest rose to meet him he dropped on one knee and grasped and kissed the hem of his long robe.

Père Gratien took him by the hand and raised him.

"Sit down, my son," he said, kindly, "and tell me why you have come. You are welcome."

The Chinaman settled himself in an arm-chair and glanced round the room.

"No one can hear us?" he said, with an air of cautious inquiry.

"No; you may speak freely."

"I wanted to be quite sure. It might be dangerous if I was overheard. It is even a danger

## A WARNING

for me that I have come here. What I say is only for yourself, Father."

"You were one of my people once—not so long ago, when your good father died," remarked the priest. "Why not kneel down and make your confession and be one of the true religion again?"

"No, no! I have not come to confession. But there is something you must know—you only."

"Well, what is it? Do not be afraid to speak freely to me."

"There is news," said Li-tsu, dropping his voice almost to a whisper—"news that very few know. They may not know it even at the yamen for days. It is true. Look at that!" And he drew from a pocket in the breast of his robe a little ring of finely woven cane-work, dyed red, and slipped it onto his right forefinger.

"What is it? Why do you show it to me?" asked Père Gratien, with a vague foreboding of coming trouble.

"It is the badge of my brotherhood—the Red Circle," answered Li-tsu. "I show it to you to prove I am a powerful man, who can do what I promise." He paused and drew himself up proudly, and looked at the other to see what impression he had made. Then he went on: "If I show it thus to a brother of the Circle, he must help me. He who wears it all the brethren must protect with their lives. See, I have another. It has been most difficult to procure it. No one can have more than one. I will give it to you

## THE RED CIRCLE

and you must keep it and show it to no one till the dangerous day comes. Then wear it and you will be safe, for I will teach you the sign and passwords."

"Listen to me, Li-tsu," said the priest, gravely. "You surely know that I can have nothing to do with this secret society of yours. You, the son of a Christian, have no right to belong to it. What would your father say if he were here, to see his son, a baptized Christian, boasting of belonging to this heathen society?"

"I do not boast," replied the Chinaman. "One must live. The brotherhood is useful. It finds me work; it protects me. I want to use it to protect you. As for my father, I do this because I honor him. It is for his sake. You cared for him when he was dying; you gave him a grave and a monument. It is the highest religion to reverence his memory. It is in memory of him I come to use the power of the Circle to save you. You will need it: you are in danger—not to-night, but it may come any day, as soon as they all know what has happened—"

"I don't understand what you are talking about," interrupted Père Gratien. "What danger is there? True, there was a riot in the country to-day; but it was all a mistake and is all over. I have seen the tao-tai. There will be no more trouble."

"No, no! There will be much trouble. The tao-tai knows nothing. We of the Circle know. A messenger came to us to-day. We have news before the tao-tai—news from Peking."

## A WARNING

“Well, what has happened at Peking?”

“I will tell you,” came the answer. “It is all over with the Europeans at Peking and all through Pe-chi-li and the north. It will soon be the same in the centre, here on the Yang-tse, and then in Yun-nan and Canton and the south. They are all dead in the north, and their houses burned. The Empress and the Emperor have ordered it. There will be no more Europeans in the Empire. The land will be free from them, and all their ships in the seaports and on the rivers will be sunk. But I will save you—you only—for my father’s sake.”

“This is a mad story. Why should I believe you?”

“I do not ask you to believe me—only to take the ring of the Circle and let me teach you the passwords. Then wait a few days and you will see that I speak truly. The people will rise. All the Europeans and all who stand by them will be killed, but I shall save you—you only, remember; for I cannot risk my life for the rest—for the railway men or the steamer men, or even for the English preacher and his women and children. They will all be killed, and you will die with them if you do not let me save you.”

“I thank you for your good will, and I am pleased that you respect your father’s memory and are still grateful for what I did for him; but I cannot touch anything that belongs to your secret society, and I have no intention of providing for my safety and leaving the rest to perish.”

## THE RED CIRCLE

"What do they matter?" asked Li-tsu, almost angrily. "The English teacher works against you; the English steamer men are not your people. The railway men can take care of themselves, for all I care. It is you I offer to save—*you*, I say. If I had thought you would refuse my offer I would not have risked my life coming here; for it is a risk. If the brothers of the Circle suspect me of telling you anything, I shall die at their hands. The lodge has its executioner. I would run such a risk only for you."

"Well, now that you have told me so much," said the priest, "I believe you thus far. There is a story in your Circle, probably untrue, of a rising against the foreigners in the north. On the strength of this story your gang will attempt a rising here in Cheng-foo, and the Europeans will be in danger. I must warn them to be on the alert and take precautions. I shall not say how I know it."

"For God's sake, do not speak to them!" Li-tsu broke out in a voice of entreaty. "I am a dead man if you speak. I have trusted you."

"I shall respect your trust. You will be quite safe. I shall act so that no one can suspect you."

"No, no, Father, you will not speak," the man insisted in a pleading voice that broke into a whine of imploring weakness. "I am a dead man if you speak a word. I thought I was safe. Do not priests keep secrets? Have I not confessed to you?"

"Yes, my son," answered Père Gratien. "You

## A WARNING

confessed to me years ago, and you were a better and happier man for it. But this is not confession. Had you come as a penitent, it would have been a different matter."

"Well, I will confess, and then you will not speak," said Li-tsu, throwing himself on his knees. "I will confess."

"You don't mean it," Père Gratien interrupted, with a touch of sternness in his voice. "You know better. Would that I could persuade you to confession and repentance! But see, my son, if you confess you must be sorry. If you truly repented of joining in a plot to murder strangers who have done you no harm, who have even done you good — the English teacher who has taken care of you in his hospital, and his wife and children—I would hear your confession and absolve you; but, unless your repentance was a lie you would have to help to prevent this evil and sin being done. You would have to allow me to warn them. No one would know whence my knowledge came. It would be my duty to protect you. Just as now it is my duty to warn them, and also to be silent as to your having told me. Do you understand?"

The man rose and stood looking at him.

"Yes," he said, "I understand. There is no persuading you to save yourself, and you want to save those others. I am sorry you will not listen to me when I tell you it is useless. You only ruin yourself; and, for all your prudence, you ruin me."

## THE RED CIRCLE

“Kneel,” said the priest. “Let me help you make your peace with God; then you will be brave enough to do what is right and to help me save them and avert all this evil-doing. And I will save you, too, even if I die for you, my son.”

“I shall come and confess some day—I shall die in my father’s faith,” said Li-tsu; “but I cannot confess now. I shall myself kill no one, but I cannot break away from the Circle. You do not understand. It is impossible. No one must know I have seen you. Tell your catechist, if he has recognized me, to be silent. He will obey you. Let me out yourself, by the wicket of the garden. I may have been followed. The house may be watched. I am in danger.”

“You have no wife or children; you are alone,” said the priest. “Stay here, and I will have you sent on board the English steamer. You will be safe there.”

“No,” said Li-tsu, “there is no safety there. There are men of the Red Circle on the barges loading up her cargo. They will seize the *Tai-shan*. If they did not, the foreigners would get away. You cannot save me that way. I must stand by the brethren of the Circle.”

Père Gratien had a fresh light on the possible perils of the situation. The man, in his terror at his own danger, had given away the most deadly part of the plot.

“Go yourself, my son, and warn the English captain,” the priest suggested. “He will protect and reward you.”

## A WARNING

"He cannot, and I shall not fight against my countrymen," was the reply.

"Then it is no use speaking further," said the priest. "God reward you for your kind intentions toward myself, and give you grace to repent and come back to me, or to my successor when I am dead and all this storm has blown over. I shall do my duty, but without betraying you. I shall not denounce you or even hint at having seen you, for you have trusted me and tried to save me. Now go! I shall let you out through the garden."

They passed out together. Li-tsu whispered a last entreaty to the priest to let him save him before it was too late. Père Gratien in a low voice answered that he had decided that matter already.

"God bless you, my son," he said, "and bring you to a better and braver mind!"

And then they parted at the little door in the garden wall.

The priest went back to the house, and passed through the sacristy into the church, now all in deep darkness except where one red speck of light burned before the altar. He knelt at the sanctuary rail, seeming to realize more in the darkness and silence of the place that he was not alone, but close to his Master, present there in the tabernacle.

He was asking for guidance and strength. With a sudden rush of vivid realization he knew that a violent death might be only a few hours distant from him. Long ago, in the quiet mission seminary in far-off France, he had thought

## THE RED CIRCLE

enthusiastically of facing death at the hands of a heathen judge or a hostile pagan mob, and dying for the faith he professed. When he chose the mission of China as his life-work he had more calmly taken into account this danger; but in his years of labor in a peaceful district, where he had many disciples and still more friends, it had seemed to vanish into the region of remote possibilities. Now he was nearly face to face with it.

There came before him a vision of his distant home—the aged father and mother, the brothers and sisters, whom long absence had made all the dearer to him. There was a human shrinking from death and separation; a shuddering dread of unknown torments that might soon be his lot. Then as he prayed he felt calm and strong again. He would do his duty and leave all in God's hands. Death must come some day, and what better end could he hope for?

No, it would not be difficult to die. The difficult thing would be to act wisely and prudently during the trying days that had begun. All he had so painfully built up in the place was in danger of destruction. Two or three days hence the church might be in a ruin and his flock scattered without a shepherd. Well, God would provide another. He offered his life for his people, and rose from his knees with a joyous and calm courage. He made his way back to the house to begin his work by warning De Visser and taking counsel with him how to save the other Europeans, whose lives might soon be in dire peril.

## CHAPTER V

### A NIGHT OF ALARMS

PÈRE GRATIEN told De Visser that he had received a friendly warning to the effect that there were rumors of a rising against the Europeans in the north, and that, though nothing would happen that night, next day or the day after there might be a rising in the town. In that case there would be an attempt to cut off the retreat of the little European colony by seizing the *Tai-shan*.

“Nothing may happen, after all,” he said. “I have heard stories of this kind before, and there has been no trouble. I feel sure that the report about Peking is a wild exaggeration, even if there is some foundation for it. Still, it may be believed by the ignorant crowd here, and may lead to another outbreak. We must be prepared and Mr. Henderson and the English sailors must be warned. We may have to send Lebrun on board the steamer. You will go with him. Of course I shall stay here, but the rest must be put in a safe place, especially the English ladies and the children. You are going to the *pasteur’s* house and you will meet the officers of the *Tai-*

## THE RED CIRCLE

*shan.* Consult with them as to what should be done, but tell them there is no danger to-night."

So De Visser, instead of going to amuse himself in Mrs. Henderson's drawing-room, or to have an idle chat over a cigar in her husband's study, set out for the house on the hill, anxiously revolving in his mind the problem of the best way to give warning without creating undue alarm, and the best course to suggest for meeting the impending danger. He had satisfactory news as to the condition of the wounded man. This was the only pleasant feature of his mission.

As he approached the house he heard the piano; some one was playing a lively air. As he entered the drawing-room he saw that it was Miss Kirby. Marker was turning the music for her. Mr. Henderson and his wife and MacMurdo formed a friendly group round the little tea-table. A cup had been placed for him, showing that he was expected. He gave his good news of Lebrun, and there was talk of the morning's incident. All agreed that it had ended very well, everything considered. It might have been worse.

"I don't think the countryfolk meant mischief," said Henderson, "till your friend knocked one of them out. I don't blame him. One has to defend oneself. You will have to take a guard from the town next time. The townsfolk are all right. We have never had any trouble in Cheng-foo, and they know enough to understand that the new railway will put money in their pockets."

"Yes," observed Mrs. Henderson, "the towns-

## A NIGHT OF ALARMS

folk here are good, quiet people. Our hospital and dispensary have made us a lot of friends. I feel at home among them. On the Chinese New-Year's Day they send us a whole shopful of toys and sweetmeats for the children. They are kind-hearted, simple people. It is a pleasure to live among them. They are not like the ignorant country boors that attacked you."

De Visser had intended to talk to Mr. Henderson, but now he put it off. Why spoil the evening and give these happy people an anxious night? Nothing would happen till next day at earliest. He would go away with the Captain and MacMurdo, and hold a council of war with them. They were the important people; for the *Tai-shan* must be the center of any scheme for saving the others.

So he said nothing, but told Mrs. Henderson that she must kindly excuse his making a short visit, and asking Captain Marker and Mr. MacMurdo to walk down to the hotel with him, as he had some business matters he would like to talk over with them, now that he was left single-handed by the accident to his friend. So, after some more music, the party broke up earlier than on the night before.

It was not yet nine o'clock. He said to himself that he had still plenty of time left, and on the way down the town he refused to state what his business was. Arrived at the bund, he surprised Marker and MacMurdo by telling them that it was a matter rather serious: he did not want to

## THE RED CIRCLE

discuss it at Shanghai Jack's place, where they might be spied upon or overheard. Would they take him on board the *Tai-shan* for half an hour?

"Of course," said Marker, and hailed a native boat lying off the bund. In five minutes they were on board the steamer. Marker led the way to the cabin, switched on the electric light, produced drinks and cigars, and asked if De Visser wanted to see him alone or if MacMurdo might stay.

"I want to speak with you both," explained De Visser, "and to be quite sure we are not overheard."

"No fear of that," replied MacMurdo. But, as a precaution, he closed the skylight overhead and locked the outer door leading into the cabins from the lower deck. He saw by the Belgian's manner that he had something very serious to speak of, and he half guessed it was a warning of danger.

In a low voice De Visser conveyed Père Gratien's message. MacMurdo heard it without much sign of emotion, puffing the smoke from his cigar as he lounged easily in an arm-chair. But the Englishman became suddenly excited.

"Why the devil didn't you tell us this an hour ago?" he asked.

"Well," suggested the Belgian, "what harm is an hour's delay? Nothing will happen to-night. Père Gratien, who knows the people better than any of us, is sure of this. We have time enough to figure things out. Why should I alarm the

## A NIGHT OF ALARMS

good clergyman's household, spoil a happy evening, and give them all a sleepless night? You are the men I wanted to talk to. You can act."

"I agree," said MacMurdo, quietly, "that there is no verra great need for being in a hurry, and it's always best to think things out doucely and calmly over a long drink and a good cigar."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Marker. "No need to hurry! Something must be done at once. Why, there was that riot in the morning! The brutes nearly killed Lebrun and would have killed De Visser. Who knows what may happen before the sun is up? We ought to get the women and children on board the steamer at once, and have fires under the boilers and all ready to slip anchor. I must go back to the Hendersons'."

He was rising from his chair. MacMurdo stretched out his long arm and put his hand on his shoulder to check him.

"Doucely, doucely!" he said. "He who goes doucely and cannily goes safe and far, as we say at home. It's no use being in a flurry when things look ugly. Let the good folks at the manse have a quiet night. Keep a bright look-out, and if there is any noise in the town we can land with some of our Hong-Kong and Shanghai men. They just despise the up-river folk, and will stand by us. But nothing will happen to-night. I take the French Padre's word for it. As to raising an alarm and getting up steam to-night, what's the use? The engines are all ready; but to run down the Yang-tse in the dark would

## THE RED CIRCLE

be to pile the old ship on a gravel-bar or a reef, and stick there till the floods come in the rainy season. We can have steam up an hour after daybreak. I'll answer for that."

"No," said Marker. "It's right enough that we can't move the *Tai-shan* in the dark, but I can't stay here. You take care of the ship, Mac, and start your fires before daylight. If there's a row, tell the boys there's a hundred dollars a head for them the day we tie up safely at I-chang, and a hundred more for every man who does any fighting. I'll go ashore with De Visser. He had better sleep at the French Padre's, and be ready to get Lebrun on board if there's a row. Some of the Padre's people will help him, and they will know in time if anything is coming. I shall camp out somewhere on the hill, and be ready to slip into the parsonage and get the people away if there's an alarm. Don't argue with me. You have your orders."

"If I may make a proposal," said De Visser: "as the Captain is bent on guarding our friends on the hill, I will go up there with him. If the ladies are still up and see us arrive at the house, we can pretend it is a message about my friend Lebrun, as indeed it is. We shall see the clergyman in his study. The ladies will know nothing, and Captain Marker can find some place in the house where he can stay instead of bivouacking in the open."

"Right you are! Come with me," said Marker. He unlocked a drawer and took out a pair of re-

## A NIGHT OF ALARMS

volvers and some packages of ammunition. He loaded the weapons and gave one to De Visser. "This may be useful," he went on. "Take some cartridges, too. You had better have your own pistols out, Mac, and some cartridges ready by the rifles here, in case you have to arm our boys. I rely on you all to be on the alert on board. Get the boat away for us."

He took a light overcoat, shoved brushes and other odds and ends into its pockets, and threw it over his arm, after belting on the pistol in a holster under his loose jacket.

"I should go mad if I stayed here," he said.

The boat pushed off with the two Europeans and a couple of sturdy rowers on board. Mac-Murdo, still puffing at his cigar, watched it breaking the moonlit waters into a trail of silvery ripples till it disappeared among the junks at the bund near the lighted veranda of Shanghai Jack's hotel.

"A wilful man maun have his way," he said to himself. "The Cap is giving himself a lot of useless trouble. But, then, one must allow for young folk. If 'twas only the minister and his good lady and the bairns, Marker would have listened to reason. But there's some one else up there. It's the way of the world, from the Yang-tse to the Clyde; and doubtless I shall feel the same myself some day."

Meanwhile Marker had dashed up the steps of the bund, only turning a moment to call out to his boat's crew to pull back to the steamer at once.

## THE RED CIRCLE

He walked so rapidly through the town that De Visser found it no easy matter to keep up with him without actually running. Cheng-foo was already settling down for the night. In the suburb most of the wretched-looking houses were dark, but one was lighted up.

"They are always late there," said Marker. "It's a gambling-den and the resort of bad characters—just the place that might be the starting-point for a raid on Henderson's house."

They had hardly passed it when they looked back, for they heard a sudden outcry. The door flew open and a man rushed out. Two others followed, with bright weapons in their hands, hacking at him. He ran toward the Europeans, calling out something they could not understand, and, with a wild bound, distanced his pursuers and fell at the feet of De Visser.

Marker's pistol was in his hand in a moment. He pulled the trigger twice, and there were two red flashes. The sharp crack, crack of the reports echoed along the street. But he was not a practised shot. The bullets rattled on the tiles of a low roof. Still it was enough to stop the pursuers. They ran back to the house and closed the door.

There was moonlight enough to see that the fallen man was bleeding from more than one wound.

"Get him up to the house," said the Captain. The two men lifted him and bore him along. He was talking, trying to make them understand

## A NIGHT OF ALARMS

something; but neither knew more than a few stray words of Chinese. And the man was even more ignorant of English, and could not understand Marker's well-meant advice to him to keep quiet.

At last they laid him on the pavement of the compound. De Visser stayed with him while Marker entered the house. In the light of the entrance-hall he saw that there was blood on his hands and his clothes. He told the porter he would go into the clergyman's study, and asked if he would bring Mr. Henderson to him there at once; the ladies, he declared positively, must not see him or know that he had come.

But every one in the drawing-room had heard him coming into the hall and caught the sound of his voice. Edith Kirby came out first, and gave a startled cry as she saw him.

"You are hurt!" she exclaimed, and her face was white with the shock of seeing the blood.

"No, no! I have been helping a poor fellow who had an accident."

Mr. Henderson, as he came out, heard this explanation.

"Where is he?" he asked. "Did I hear a shot just now?"

"Possibly you did. I fired at the men who wounded him. Worse luck, I missed them. De Visser and your boys are bringing him in. Miss Kirby had better not see him."

"Edith is a trained nurse, and will help me," said Henderson.

## THE RED CIRCLE

The girl had recovered from her alarm about Marker, and was quite collected again. She closed the drawing-room door, after looking in for a moment to reassure her sister, and then went to light up the surgery at the end of the passage, along which De Visser and the porter were carrying the man.

"It's probably some quarrel over a game of fan-tan," suggested Marker. "He came running out of that gambling-den in the suburb."

The man was laid on a couch, and the clergyman examined him. There were two ugly wounds —one across the back and the right side of the head, the other in the shoulder. Edith Kirby was already cutting away the clothes from the wounded shoulder. She had slipped on an apron and looked quite cool and business-like. A servant brought water and sponges. Henderson was opening a case of instruments.

"We were coming back to talk to you of another matter — rather a serious business," said Marker.

"That must wait now," replied Henderson, who was busy cleaning a wound with an antiseptic solution and carefully examining it. "This cut on the head looks nasty. It's very serious."

The man showed no sign of pain. He began talking to the missionary.

"What does he say?" asked De Visser.

"He wants the French Padre to come. He says he is dying and must see him. I shall send one of the servants presently."

## A NIGHT OF ALARMS

The Belgian at once volunteered to go with the message.

"No, let the servant do it," suggested Marker—"that is, if we need send at all. If he wants to pray, surely Mr. Henderson can pray right enough for any Chinaman, without worrying that poor Frenchman out of his bed or taking him away from Lebrun."

Henderson was all the time at work, Edith handing him what he wanted and seeming to know without a word what to do.

"I know the man, or used to know him," said the clergyman. "He was once in our Bible class, but he says now he is one of the French Padre's people. If they ask for their priest, I make it a rule to send. It's only right. But *you* need not go. I will send the servant."

The porter was called in, for the wounded man had said he must give him a message for the priest. The two Chinamen spoke together. In reply to a questioning look from the Belgian Henderson explained that the man had simply remarked: "Say it is Li-tsu, and he will know why I have been wounded. Tell him I am dying."

De Visser insisted on going with the messenger. He wanted to act, if need be, as an escort to Père Gratien; so the two set out together.

"He is not really dying?" said Marker, half asserting, half questioning what he said. "He does not seem to be in pain, and the bleeding is stopped."

## THE RED CIRCLE

"I am afraid he has a bad chance of life," replied Henderson, gravely. "And he must be suffering a good deal of pain. They don't show it as we do. I am wondering if it's worth while to risk an operation and get rid of a bit of crushed bone here. I am afraid it will do no good. What do you think, Edith?"

The girl moved the light and bent over the man, lifting the dressing from the wound in the head to examine the injury more closely. She replaced the pad of lint and looked up.

"No," she said; "I should leave it as it is."

Then she spoke to the man in a low, distinct voice in Chinese, and he answered her.

Marker felt a new admiration for her. There seemed such an air of comforting kindness in her soft, low voice, her look, her very attitude. For a moment, at the beginning, he had been a little repelled by what seemed the hard, unfeeling, business-like way in which she had done her work. Now he saw how much she felt for the patient.

"He says the pain does not matter very much," she observed, turning to Captain Marker. "I told him we could put him to sleep for a while, but he says he must not sleep till he has seen the Padre."

"I should give him a stiff dose of opium, all the same," suggested Marker.

Edith shook her head, brought a drink, and gave it to the man, talking to him in the same soothing tone. Henderson touched Marker on the shoul-

## A NIGHT OF ALARMS

der and told him they could now leave the patient with Edith and a native servant.

"Come to my room and have a wash," he added. "I can give you a jacket of mine. There's a lot of blood on your own."

While he was changing his coat and washing, Marker told Henderson the news that Père Gratien had sent by De Visser. The clergyman was frankly incredulous. All he would grant was that there might be some local rising in the north, but he refused to believe that there was any real danger in quiet, law-abiding Cheng-foo.

Then they went to the drawing-room, where they found Mrs. Henderson sitting sewing by a shaded lamp. It was not the first time some victim of a Chinese quarrel had been brought to the dispensary, and she was not alarmed by the incident. Nothing was said of the report sent by the French missionary; but Captain Marker told of his adventure in the suburb, and explained his return by saying that he had walked back with De Visser, who wanted to see Mr. Henderson again before going to take care of the other patient at the French mission.

Presently they heard some one arriving at the house, and Henderson went out to welcome the priest. In a few minutes he came back, accompanied by De Visser and Edith Kirby. Père Gratien had been left alone with the wounded Li-tsu.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FATE OF LI-TSU

MRS. HENDERSON slipped out of the room. She was hospitably intent on having some refreshments made ready for her late visitors. Her husband, too, was absent for a few minutes. He called her into his study and told her not to be alarmed by reports she might presently hear of rumors circulating in the town. Meanwhile Edith Kirby was left with Marker and De Visser.

"How is your patient?" the Belgian asked her.

"I think he is weaker," she said. "His pulse is lower. My brother will see him again as soon as Père Gratien leaves him."

"What is the French Padre doing for the Chinaman? Reading prayers over him?" asked the Captain, more for the sake of saying something to relieve the tension in his own mind than from any interest in the question.

"He administers to him the last rites," answered De Visser.

Miss Kirby saw the puzzled look on Marker's face and explained:

"He gives him absolution, no doubt, after hear-

## THE FATE OF LI-TSU

ing him confess. He is one of his people. It is for his confession they are left alone."

"I dare say it's all right, if he wants it very badly and gets any comfort out of it," said Marker; "but I should say the sooner the Padre gets it done and lets Mr. Henderson see the Chinaman again, the better. After all, your brother, Miss Kirby—and yourself—can do the poor fellow more good than all the priests from Cheng-foo to Rome itself."

"How do we know?" she answered, as if thinking aloud. "We try to be kind to these people and help them, and we do something. This poor fellow used once to come to our Sunday-school; before that he used to go to the French Padre's chapel. Now, when he is face to face with the end, he sends for him, and refuses even opium and bears a lot of pain to be able to speak to him. He evidently really believes the Padre can do something for him that my brother cannot."

"I suppose it's a bit of his superstition in another shape," conjectured the Englishman. "The Chinaman thinks a lot of ceremonies and fuss."

"It may be repentance," said Edith Kirby, thoughtfully.

"Rather a late one, though," put in Marker, now in a mood to dispute, and a little upset at so much being made of a mere Chinaman.

"Yes, a little late," said the Belgian, quietly; "let us hope not too late. That thief on the cross was very late also."

## THE RED CIRCLE

Mrs. Henderson came back with a servant, who placed a tray of tea-things and refreshments on a table. A moment after, Mr. Henderson entered, followed by the priest, who was folding up his stole as he came in. In his Chinesè dress Père Gratien looked a strange figure among the European surroundings of the room. On other visits he had been with the clergyman in his study, but this was the first time he had been in the English drawing-room. He bowed gravely to the ladies and then to Captain Marker. The place brought back to him a memory of his old home in Touraine. It was like, but unlike, its likeness coming from its contrast with the surroundings in which he lived.

"It was good of you to send for me," he said, speaking in French to Mr. Henderson. "The good God will bless you for your charity to this poor man. He has prepared for death. Will he live through the night? If you think death is near, I shall stay with him to the end."

"But what about your patient at your house?" asked the clergyman.

"My catechist will take care of him. Then there is another matter. Have you received the message I sent by Monsieur de Visser?"

"Yes," replied Henderson. "But, personally, I think it is a rumor that we need not take very seriously."

"I wish I could share your opinion," said Père Gratien. "I think you will agree with me that it is serious enough when I tell you that we have

## THE FATE OF LI-TSU

some confirmation of it in the fate of Li-tsu. He lets me tell you now more than I could have said before. Only a few hours ago he came to me to warn me, though he knew that he ran a great risk even in coming to my house; for he belongs to a secret society here. He was evidently watched and then denounced, and so he is dying because he tried to save us."

Of those in the room, the Captain of the *Tai-shan* was the only one who could not understand what was being said, for his only languages were his native tongue and the "pidgin-English" of the river. But he saw by the faces of the others that Père Gratien was telling them something serious, no doubt what he himself had already heard from the Belgian. Edith Kirby beckoned him aside and explained it all, as she stood with him at the open window looking on the veranda of the garden. She added that while she was alone with Li-tsu he had personally warned her of the coming danger.

"I knew it already from Mr. de Visser," said the Captain. "That's why I couldn't bear to stay out on the river. I came back to see if I could find some way of staying to guard the house through the night, without frightening you by raising any alarm. That's how I met this chap when those brutes knocked him out. He's a good sort, though he is a Chinaman. What can be done for him? Can't we save him, after all?"

"I'm afraid he's going fast," said the girl. "We can only make it easy for him. I have seen many

## THE RED CIRCLE

die, and he is dying. His priest will stay with him and comfort him. My brother and I will do our part. Perhaps it is better he should go now when all is well with him. One can often see that it is so when people are dying. The time is come when it is best for them."

"What a little philosopher you are!" said Marker. "But now think of yourself and your sister and the children. If there is a rising here, the *tao-tai* will do nothing. We shall have to shift for ourselves, and the best place for the white people will be the deck of the *Tai-shan*. My crew will stick to me, and we can run down to I-chang or Hankow in safety, even if every town on the upper river is ablaze. There's a gunboat near Hankow with our flag flying, and that's as good as if England began at Hankow city."

"My brother will decide if we must go," said Edith. "Surely we need not discuss our plans just now."

"I want it settled at once," said Marker, eagerly. "I want to see you safe. I don't care what happens, but you are safe once you have your foot on the *Tai-shan*'s side-ladder; and the sooner the better. It will be the proudest moment of my life. I want to save you, and the rest for your dear sake. Surely you know what I feel for you." And he took her hand as he spoke.

For a moment she returned his grasp and then drew her hand away.

"Don't say any more now," she said—"don't! When all this terrible time is over we can think

## THE FATE OF LI-TSU

of other things. We are all grateful to you and rely on you."

Mrs. Henderson had left the room. She had gone to be with her children, and—in her feeling that danger might come at any moment—to make preparations for hastily leaving the house with them. It was in vain that Père Gratien and her husband had assured her that there was no danger that night. Then the clergyman and the priest had gone together to Li-tsu's bedside. De Visser, left alone, came toward the window. Edith turned to meet him.

"Mr. Henderson," said the Belgian, "is now convinced that there is trouble threatening, and he agrees that if things come to the worst we must go on board the steamer. He asked Père Gratien if he would go with us, but he says that whatever happens he stays in Cheng-foo, and your brother-in-law says that in that case he also will stay. I admire Mr. Henderson for it, but I am sure he is wrong. He ought to go; for he has you and your sister and the little ones to take care of. With the priest it is different—he naturally stays with his people."

There was a sudden flush of excitement on Edith's face, an unwonted animation in her voice, as she said:

"My sister's husband is as brave, as devoted to his people, as the French priest. Why say it is different?"

De Visser answered in a quiet tone:

"Monsieur le Pasteur is no doubt brave, *dévoué*

## THE RED CIRCLE

—all that one can ask of him. I am not of his Church; I am a Catholic, but all the same I honor him. He is a good man—of the best. But, Mademoiselle, let us look at the situation. He cannot keep the dispensary open. If the riot comes, the first thing they will say is that he is a poisoner. His very good deeds will be made a cry against him. He can pray, it is true, with his people, and encourage them; but cannot the Chinese Bible-reader of whom he tells me do that for them? If he stays to die, how can his wife go and think of his death, here all alone? Pardon me, Mademoiselle, if I speak frankly. He *must* go. It is his duty. He must help to take care of her, of the little ones, of yourself, Mademoiselle; and to use his skill if any should be wounded on the *Tai-shan*, as may happen; and to take care of my poor comrade, whom we shall put under the awning of the steamer to-morrow.”

“But the Frenchman stays—”

“Yes. With the priest it is otherwise. He has not wife or child. He is alone; he belongs to his people only. He must stay to do for them what no other can do, when the danger comes and death is among them. Your brother will hesitate to go. He is a brave man, who is fearless in danger. But he will do right to go. As for my friend, the priest, he will stay—he must stay. I should wonder if he thought of anything else.”

“But why not go now, and come back to do more work when the revolt is over, instead of throwing his life away?” asked the girl.

## THE FATE OF LI-TSU

"You cannot understand; I cannot explain. But yes: see what he is doing to-night. He helps that poor man. If there are more asking such help of him when the trouble comes—if it does come—he must be there even at the risk of his life. It is his duty. It does not help to say he goes away and comes back to others who may need him next year. These call for him now. But I confuse it. I have no right to talk; for, *ma foi!* it is easy to say what others should do. The hard thing is to see one's own way?"

"That's plain enough for us all," interrupted the Captain. "If there's a row, we shall be ready to get every white man, woman, and child safe on board the *Tai-shan*. If the French Padre wants to stay for those treacherous scoundrels of yellow-faced pigtails, we bring him along, whether he likes it or not. If John Chinaman tries to stop us, some Chinamen won't live to tell the story, that's all. By Jove! if that yellow scum gets in the way of myself and Mac and our boys, they'll have a rough time! I've something to fight for now." And he looked at Miss Kirby.

Just then Mr. Henderson came into the room with a very grave face. All three turned to him with inquiring looks.

"He is gone," he said, solemnly. "The priest is praying by his bedside. He went very quickly at the last. It was a sight to see that good Frenchman bending over him, saying Chinese prayers into his ear as if prompting him, and then breaking out into Latin invocations, quite forgetting

## THE RED CIRCLE

me; calling on angels and saints to come to meet the dying man, and bidding his soul go forth in the name of its Creator."

"It was the ritual for the dying," explained De Visser.

"Well," put in the Captain, "the Chinaman did us a good turn, and it cost him his life. I'm glad he had his priest to pray over him, if it made it any easier for him. I hope, sir, you will allow me to put the ladies and children on board the *Tai-shan* first thing in the morning, when we bring Lebrun on board. I don't like leaving it to the last. There's the suburb and a long street between your house and the riverside."

The Captain's offer was discussed. Henderson said that of course if things came to the worst the presence of the *Tai-shan* in the river was the one hope of safety, in case the tao-tai did not succeed in maintaining order in the town. But they must leave any move to the steamer to the last, or at least until there were more certain signs of danger. It would not do to show premature alarm. It might only provoke an outbreak that otherwise would not have occurred—just as if you show fear of a dog he will attack you. After all, the tao-tai might keep the peace even if there was an attempt at disturbance. Père Gratien would pay him an official visit early in the morning and use his influence with him. He himself would pay a less formal visit. In any case, there was no danger to-night.

He promised to find a room in the house for

## THE FATE OF LI-TSU

Marker. He would send some of his servants to escort the priest to the mission station and De Visser to the hotel. Henderson's quiet, collected manner as he thus summed up the position was reassuring. He recognized the danger, but there would be time enough to prepare to meet it.

Père Gratien bade the household good night and promised to arrange for the funeral of Li-tsu next day; then he went away with De Visser and the friendly escort provided by the English clergyman. At the mission station they found Lebrun sleeping peacefully, and De Visser went on to Shanghai Jack's hotel on the riverside. He looked across the river at the *Tai-shan* and saw lights still under the awning. MacMurdo was sitting up, "figuring things out" over a pipe.

Shanghai Jack, in polite phrases, expressed surprise at his guest being so late. De Visser told him that he had been detained at Mr. Henderson's house, looking after a man who had been brought in dying, hurt in a row at the fan-tan house in the suburb.

"Velly bad place, that," said the Chinaman. "Low place altogether. Good men come play fan-tan respeccable house, not that low place, sir. If man win money that place, they rob and kill him. See?"

"I hope we shall have no more robbing and killing," said De Visser. "I hear some ugly talk of a rising in the town against the Europeans. Have you heard anything?"

"Don't mind foolish talk," answered Shanghai

## THE RED CIRCLE

Jack, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Cheng-foo good town, good people. Some fools will talk. It happen before, but nothing come of it. Velly much talk, man do nothing. Dog bark, don't bite. See? Sleep well, sir; you quite safe my hotel."

"I hope you are right," said De Visser. "But you have the best chance of getting news, so let me know if you hear of any trouble coming."

"Yes, I keep eyes open. Good night!"

## CHAPTER VII

### CAPTAIN MARKER'S PLANS

**MARKER**, a young man and a sailor, slept well, and woke with, for the first moment, a vague feeling that the tragedy of poor Li-tsu was an unpleasant dream. Others in the household had not been so fortunate. Mrs. Henderson had passed an almost sleepless night, haunted by fears for her children, and she looked tired and haggard when the family met at the breakfast-table. Her husband, too, had been wakeful, thinking of plans for the menacing future.

Before breakfast the whole household had assembled in the spacious dining-room for family worship, and the head of it had chosen for that morning's reading one of the psalms that tell of safety under the protection of the Most High. Marker glanced at the kneeling group of Chinese servants, and wondered if any of them knew of the rumors that were current; but he could read nothing on their expressionless, impassive features.

The servants withdrew, and the rest gathered round the table. It was a beautifully fine morning. Through the open windows one saw the

## THE RED CIRCLE

garden, and between its trees there was just a glimpse of the crowded roofs of the town below the slope of the hill. Beyond, a dim haze showed where the morning mist was rising from the Yang-tse; and through this thin veil a far-off mountain range loomed up like a bluish-gray shadow.

The meal had hardly begun when a servant brought a letter from Père Gratien. He wrote that Lebrun had passed a good night and showed satisfactory improvement. He was about to proceed to the yamen to see the tao-tai, and would send an early report of the result of his interview. Meanwhile he was sorry to have to communicate news that showed the position might soon be very serious. A messenger had reached the mission that morning from a brother missionary at Si-ngan, in the province of Shen-si. It informed him that it was reported locally that there had been a rising at Peking; that the Chinese troops had joined the rebels and massacred the foreign ambassadors and the Christians; and that at Si-ngan, though there had been no rising, there was a dangerous agitation. The letter warned him to be prepared for the trouble possibly spreading into the Yang-tse valley.

Mr. Henderson did not read this alarming news for his household and his guest. He told only the good news about Lebrun, and mentioned that Père Gratien would presently send word of the result of his state visit to the magistrate. Then, in order to keep up the conversation and divert

## CAPTAIN MARKER'S PLANS

every one's thoughts from more serious channels, he said to Marker:

"You would be surprised if you saw our friend, the French Padre, on his way to the yamen in full state. It's a swagger affair, I can tell you."

"He does not put on much style, generally," said Marker. "He looks like a Chinese shop-keeper."

"It's different when he goes to the yamen," explained Henderson. "He is dressed up in silk robes, with an embroidered cap with a feather and a jeweled button. He goes in a fine sedan chair, with half a dozen servants, all in their best, walking beside it; and two more out in front, carrying big blue-and-gold placards telling the Chinamen what a great man he is."

Marker looked surprised.

"Why does he turn out in that style? To astonish the natives, I suppose."

Henderson explained that, under a treaty with France, the Catholic missionaries had official rank, and so could meet the magistrates as equals. They used it to break down the barriers that Chinese red tape and ceremony would otherwise put in the way of negotiation, and doubtless it gave them influence with the official class.

"I'm not sure myself," he continued, "that it is not a mistake. But it's hard to say. To do the Padre justice, I am sure he does not like it one bit. He lives like a poor man in that wretched Chinese house of his; and if he swaggers along this morning like a big mandarin, it is only to

## THE RED CIRCLE

impress the feeble official here, and try to get him to screw up his courage and keep peace and order in the place."

"Of course it's a mistake," said the Captain. "The right way would be to go as a European instead of dressing up as a Chinaman. He should take a big stick, and let that squint-eyed old humbug at the yamen know that if he doesn't walk straight he will be knocked into a cocked hat. That's how I would work it."

There was a hearty laugh all round the table. Henderson suggested that Marker's vigorous and unconventional methods might perhaps be a mistake in the other direction.

"Naturally you say so," argued Marker. "Ministers of the Gospel don't fit in with big-stick methods. But if you and the Padre will just give us laymen the word, we will chip in when the time comes. Do you know the story of the clergyman who nearly killed himself running to catch a train, and just saw it moving away from the end of the platform?"

"Well, what happened?"

"He saw a mere layman in the same fix, and said to him: 'You might oblige with an appropriate remark, sir.' It's useful to have a layman to the fore sometimes."

"I am sure," said Henderson, smiling, "that we all feel the safer for having you beside us just now."

Marker announced that he would go down to the steamer for a while, and arrange to have

## CAPTAIN MARKER'S PLANS

Lebrun put on board as soon as possible, and made comfortable there.

"Don't be in too great a hurry," said Henderson. "The Padre says he is much better. Why not move him down to one of the big rooms at Shanghai Jack's place? There he can be put on board the *Tai-shan* in five minutes, if there is any reason for it. Don't meet trouble half-way. All this talk will most likely end in nothing."

He suggested that they should have a conference later in the morning, and this was agreed to.

Breakfast was at last over. Marker, as he rose to go, snatched a word with Edith Kirby, and told her he would not be long away. A servant had brought a message for the clergyman. Marker took his sun helmet and went out with him to the great door opening on the compound, or courtyard.

There a strange sight met their eyes. Paul, the catechist of the Catholic mission, had arrived with four men carrying a brilliantly painted coffin. At the gateway of the yard, kept back by a couple of Mr. Henderson's servants, appeared another party of Chinamen, carrying a still more wonderful coffin, bright with red and blue and gold paper, cut in fantastic patterns, pasted on the wood and varnished over.

"What's the matter?" asked the Captain. "There are plenty of coffins, anyhow."

Standing under the veranda that ran along the side of the house, with his native secretary beside him, Henderson was talking in Chinese to Paul

## THE RED CIRCLE

and to another Chinaman, who was the leader of the party that had brought the second coffin, still detained at the outer gate. After a few minutes the clergyman turned to the Captain and explained the situation.

The French priest had arranged for the dead man's funeral to take place from his mission station, and had sent his catechist to remove the body of Li-tsu. But the alleged man's brother had also come for the body with another coffin, and wanted to take it away for a Chinese funeral. But the catechist was protesting that this man was a pretender; for Li-tsu was not a Cheng-foo man, but an immigrant who had no relatives in the place. While Henderson spoke with Marker, Paul and the "brother" of Li-tsu were in fierce dispute.

Henderson begged them to be silent, and proposed a compromise. Why not combine forces over the funeral? He told the "brother" that Li-tsu would be buried with all honor at the French cemetery. He himself promised that he should have the finest of monuments. Why not follow the catechist and his party as mourners when they removed the body, and send away this unnecessary second coffin? The man said he must consult his friends, and retired to the outer gate, where there was a whispered consultation.

Presently he came back, and said he agreed to Mr. Henderson's proposal. Marker waited to see how it would end. The catechist and his party entered the house; the other coffin was sent away; the men waited in the courtyard. At last the dead

## CAPTAIN MARKER'S PLANS

man was brought out in his coffin. All stood respectfully while it was borne through the compound and out into the road. Then the friends fell into rank around it, and the little procession disappeared at a bend of the road.

"That is happily settled. I was afraid there might be trouble," said the clergyman.

The Captain started for the steamer. At the bund, while he was waiting for his boat, he inquired for De Visser at Shanghai Jack's hotel, and learned that the Belgian had gone out some time ago—"gone up-town," as the Chinaman vaguely put it.

"Mr. MacMurdo come ashore at sun-up," said Shanghai Jack; "take blekfast heah with Mr. de Vissel; tell me send big lot wood 'longside. Two big sampan-loads go off soon. One load up lite heah"—and he pointed along the wharf to where a crowd of coolies were carrying logs of fire-wood from a great wood-pile to a barge on the riverside.

"That's all right," said Marker, backing up his subordinate without quite understanding why MacMurdo had given the order.

"But he not take my goods," said Shanghai Jack, with a tone of complaint. "Send back two sampan-loads my goods consigned I-chang. He tell me no room, and he load up all this rubbish timber. What for so?"

"We'll talk about that after I have seen Mr. MacMurdo," answered Marker, as he stepped into his boat.

## THE RED CIRCLE

Leaning back and handling the tiller lines as the Chinese oarsmen gave way, he noticed a thin thread of smoke rising into the hot, still air from the funnel of the *Tai-shan*. "Mac has lighted his fires already," he thought; and he felt pleased that the *Tai-shan* would soon be ready to slip her anchors at a moment's notice, if need be.

The engineer was waiting for him at the gang-way of the steamer. Yesterday there had been a barge lashed to each side of the *Tai-shan*, and gangs of coolies had been running packages of cargo on board by hand. To-day no other craft lay near her. The crew were squatted in a group forward, smoking and idling. Only some of the stokers and engine-room hands were at work.

"Glad to see you again, Captain," said Mac-Murdo as Marker came on board. "Let's talk things over up here. It's pleasanter than down below." And he placed two deck-chairs and produced his cigar-case.

Marker seated himself, lit a cigar, and began:

"I hear you have been ashore this morning, and I suppose De Visser told you all about last night."

"Yes, I've had the whole yarn. That saves time. I like that De Visser. He's a cool, quiet chap—not so fiery as the dark one that got knocked out, but a man I would rely on in a tight place. He has put Shanghai Jack on to spying round for information. I don't trust Chinamen, but I rather think Jack will run

## CAPTAIN MARKER'S PLANS

straight, for it's his interest to have trade develop up here. He's a bit of a foreigner himself in Cheng-foo."

"Shanghai Jack seems to have a grievance. I dare say what you have done has a good reason for it, Mac; but he tells me you have refused most of his cargo, and are taking a lot of fire-wood from him instead."

"Quite so," said MacMurdo. "I'm sorry to upset the old heathen's business arrangements, but it had to be done. After you went last night I felt a wee lonely. I sat here by myself for a long time, figuring things out, before I turned in. I think I got the hang of it at last; and, as I could not consult you and time is important, I gave orders this morning, and everything will soon be shipshape. I have no doubt you'll agree to my plans when I tell you my reasons."

"Well, fire away, Mac, and don't waste time! I have to go ashore again presently."

"Precisely. Well, first of all, I started the fires and had a general clean-up in my department. You leave me to run my own end of the show so much by myself that it's like as not you don't appreciate the special difficulty of running engines and boilers on wood fires instead of good honest coal. Coal gives a long sight more heat and power than those chunks of old timber, and doesn't burn away so fast."

"I know," said Marker.

MacMurdo, talking as if he were explaining a problem to a pupil, continued:

## THE RED CIRCLE

“It’s one thing to know an obvious fact and another to see its practical application. If we have to run for it, we can’t do as we do on other voyages—tie up for a fresh supply of wood at half a score of tumble-down towns between this and I-chang. They may be all up and playing devilish tricks of their own. We may have to hold on to Hankow, where the gunboats will keep the peace. We shall have to start with a thundering big lot of fuel in hand.”

“Quite right. That’s why you have upset Shanghai Jack’s arrangements and saved all the cargo space we have left for more wood. Quite right!”

“That’s not all,” MacMurdo went on. “I’ve been figuring it out, I tell you—making my calculations as a scientific man should. If all our bunkers were full, and all our spare cargo space, we could barely reach I-chang without getting more stuff from the shore; but Hankow would be simply out of our reach in case I-chang was a bit nasty. I thought at first of seizing junks down-river, and stripping them for fire-wood—in fact, burning all their spars and top-work in bits in our furnaces. But, then, it would be a long job, and we don’t want the *Tai-shan* to be a river pirate. At last I decided we must tow down a couple of barge-loads of wood. We have the current with us, and we shall go fast enough. When we tie up for the night we can clear out one of them, and leave her, and get rid of the other next night. That way after two days’ run

## CAPTAIN MARKER'S PLANS

we shall still have our stock of fuel on board complete. You approve?"

"Yes, I think it will work."

"Now, another thing," said MacMurdo. "There are some stout planks coming on board this morning. I have had some holes drilled already in the deck round the steering-wheel, and picked out some bolts from our spare lot. I mean to fix up a neat barricade round the wheel, and lash some planks along the rail. In case they take pot shots at us from the bank, it will make it all the more comfortable for you and the others on deck. Then I have given Shanghai Jack an order for some extra stores and mattresses and mosquito-curtains, to make our passengers comfortable. I've done a lot already, and I'm willing to pay half the bill—"

"You need not talk of that," interrupted Marker. "This trip means a lot to me. You are a good chum, Mac; and I don't mind telling you right now that if we have to run for it, and get Henderson's party down the river safely, there will be a wedding at Hankow."

"Hearty congratulations!" exclaimed MacMurdo, taking Marker's hand and nearly crushing it. "So you put the question last night and settled it."

"It's as good as settled," answered Marker. "To come back to business. I am just as glad we sent away the cargo men and their barges. That will rather upset the plan of rushing the *Tai-shan* if the row comes. But you must keep

## THE RED CIRCLE

an eye on the fellows that bring the wood-boats along. They are a different lot, but those rascals may get in among them."

"You trust me for that," said MacMurdo. "Only one barge comes alongside at a time. Our own men are promised extra pay for helping to rush the stuff on board and making the other Johnnies hurry up, and our own men do the trimming below. I keep an eye on the whole affair; and the serang [boatswain] is ready to turn out with half a dozen of our lot, with rifles, if there is any trouble."

"I shall not forget all this to you, Mac," said Marker, rising. "I shall go ashore now. Whatever happens, stick to the ship; but keep a look-out, and have a boat ready at all times to go to the bund. And if you see the flag at Shanghai Jack's hotel run up and down the halyards three or four times, that means you arm the boat's crew before you send it. I shall probably let you have a message—a letter—by a native boat soon, for I expect to get news at the parson's. Now, good-by for a bit."

He stepped into the boat, and the men pulled for the landing-place. A big native barge heaped with wood was being steered alongside of the *Tai-shan*. On top of her cargo, the heavy planks fresh from the sawpit showed that Shanghai Jack was executing his orders, and had sent off some of the material for MacMurdo's projected bulwarks with the first supply of fuel for his engines.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PREPARING FOR THE STORM

ON landing at Shanghai Jack's hotel, Captain Marker was pleased to find De Visser waiting for him under the wide veranda in front of it. The Belgian's round, good-natured face bore a look of unwonted seriousness, so that Marker's first word to him was:

"What is the matter? Is it bad news of Lebrun?"

"No," said De Visser. "Lebrun goes well. I have had a room made ready for him here. Père Gratien will presently remove him to the hotel. But there is other news. Come with me to the English Padre's, and I will tell you as we walk."

They passed by a short lane into the wide street of shops that ran east and west through the town. There was nothing to indicate that there was any special excitement in Cheng-foo. Business was proceeding in the leisurely fashion of the East. Shopkeepers squatted among their goods or bargained with a customer. Artisans were at work under the colored awnings of their open booths. The groups they passed looked at them with good-

## THE RED CIRCLE

humored curiosity. There were no signs of the least ill will.

As they walked along the shaded side of the street, De Visser told his news. First, it appeared that the catechist Paul had arrived at the French mission station, reporting that the friends of the departed Li-tsu, after agreeing to Mr. Henderson's proposal that they should give up their idea of themselves taking away the body, and instead follow it as mourners to Père Gratien's chapel, had gone peaceably enough with the catechist's party until the coffin had been carried about half-way to the mission station. Then, without warning, on a signal from the man who had said he was Li-tsu's brother, they had knocked down the catechist with a club, stunning him, hustled the bearers of the coffin, taken it from them, and carried it off in triumph to a house in the town.

Quickly recovering, Paul had returned to the French mission station, told his story, and sent word to Mr. Henderson of what had happened. Soon after, through a native Christian, it was ascertained that the leaders of the party which had captured Li-tsu's coffin meant to give him a funeral that afternoon, and were already spreading the report that he had been enticed into Mr. Henderson's house, where the French and English had met and killed him because he belonged to the patriotic society of the Red Circle. This meant that there would be an outbreak toward nightfall.

So far nothing had been said publicly in the

## PREPARING FOR THE STORM

town of the news from the north; but Père Gratien attached great importance to a message he had received from the Catholic mission of Si-ngan, in Shen-si, confirming the report of trouble at Peking, and bidding him be on his guard. The situation was, therefore, extremely serious. They had a few hours still in which to act. It was not yet eleven o'clock. Père Gratien had asked De Visser to confer with the Captain and Mr. Henderson as to what steps were to be taken to meet the coming crisis.

De Visser told his story with a quiet air that suggested that, although he felt the position was serious, he had little fear for himself. The somewhat phlegmatic temperament of the Fleming enabled him perfectly to control his feelings. The Englishman found it more difficult to avoid breaking out into expressions not of fear, but of anxiety to act and strike a blow somewhere in anticipation of the attack.

"Père Gratien has had a long conference with the tao-tai, and has since exchanged messages with him," said De Visser. "And now comes the most serious part of what I have to tell you. Mr. Henderson knows it already, for Père Gratien has sent him a long letter. The tao-tai has heard something about the Peking news. We cannot discover whether it is a dispatch from the authorities or merely information given by one of the chiefs of the Red Circle. But, however this may be, he is not quite sure whether it may not be true that the Empress and the Government

## THE RED CIRCLE

have declared war against the Europeans. He did not say this; but Père Gratien, who has lived so many years among the Chinese, was able to find out what he thought by a few dexterous questions. The Chinaman tried to equivocate, but could not deceive our friend. It was evident that he had not made up his mind what to do. He fears that if he acts against the Red Circle men he may find that he is really acting against the friends of the Government. At best he will act only in a timid way. He will try to 'save his face,' as they say. He will be anxious to be on the winning side, however it all ends."

"But surely the Padre could prove to him that, if he plays the fool with the Europeans, it will be a very bad job for him sooner or later," said Marker. "The fellow cannot be such a damned fool as to believe that that rotten lot of Chinamen can defy all Europe."

"Don't be too sure of that," observed De Visser, very calmly. "The tao-tai is a rather ignorant official who has been employed all his life in inland provinces, and has very vague ideas about what Europe—or France or England—means. I believe he once saw your two gunboats at Hankow, and I am afraid he was not much impressed. Europe is very far off. He runs a double risk if he acts vigorously against the mob of Cheng-foo. I am telling you what Père Gratien says; for, mind you, I don't pretend to know much after only a few months in China. The Red Circle probably has members among the handful of troops at the

## PREPARING FOR THE STORM

tao-tai's command; and, though the society is not strong in the town, it has enough adherents to form the centre of a movement. The shopkeepers and merchants are on our side, for they want trade to be opened; but they are not a fighting lot. The Red Circle men are mostly river-dwellers; some of them have been river pirates, and some of them are disbanded soldiers. One of their chiefs is an ex-brigand. The tao-tai risks, first, being murdered; and, in the second place, the chance of finding that, if he keeps the peace in Cheng-foo, he has done just what the Empress does not want, and will lose his head."

"But if he does not keep the peace he will lose his head in case it turns out that the Government is against the Peking revolt."

"Precisely. Therefore he will pretend to defend us, but take care not to be too vigorous. If the mob gets the upper hand, and it turns out in the end that the Government is against them, he will argue that he did his best, but had few soldiers, and some of them were unfaithful. If the Government is on the side of the rising, he will say that he took care to let it succeed, making only a show of force in order to support the dignity of the Government and protect the property of the traders of the town."

"But, look here!" said Marker. "Surely this old yellow devil must know that, whatever Peking thinks, the viceroys on the Yang-tse are in favor of European trade and will make short work of him if he allows us to be murdered."

## THE RED CIRCLE

"Père Gratien urged that on him," answered De Visser. "He even showed him recent friendly proclamations of the viceroys. The tao-tai replied that he would do his duty; that he was quite aware of the enlightened views of the viceroys, and that so far he had no reason to believe that their views were not approved by the Emperor and the Empress Mother. He laid a nasty stress on the 'so far,' and Père Gratien was not favorably impressed."

They had now traversed the suburb and reached the English mission station. They were taken at once to the missionary's study—the same room where two evenings before De Visser had chatted pleasantly with Henderson and MacMurdo. The short time since then had been so crowded with events that now it seemed to him a month ago.

Mr. Henderson came in and welcomed them. He opened his cigar-box and put a siphon on the table, and a bottle of lime-juice, suggesting that it was early for anything stronger. The Captain mixed cool drinks in the long tumblers that stood ready on a small table near the large desk, with its heap of books and papers. The clergyman's hearty welcome, his quiet manner, his attention to such small details for the comfort of his visitors, were all reassuring. Perhaps this was why he did not at once plunge into the pressing business of the moment.

"I take it," he said at last, "you both know all the news, except as to one detail. I have just sent a note to my colleague at the French mission

## PREPARING FOR THE STORM

to let him know that I also have seen the tao-tai. I went to the yamen with my native secretary, Mr. Sung. At first the tao-tai pretended he was too busy to see us; but I would not be put off, and we got in at last and had twenty minutes with him."

"Any result?" asked Marker. "I wish I knew how to talk his lingo. I would want only five minutes' straight talk with him."

"I have no doubt you would put things forcibly," said the clergyman, with a smile. "I tried more peaceful diplomacy, chiefly with the hope of getting information as to his state of mind. My impressions quite confirm those of Père Gratien, who is a better judge than I am, for he has been longer in China. But I got one promise out of the magistrate, though I fear it is not worth much."

"No. He would lie to get rid of you," said Marker, contemptuously.

"Perhaps so," continued Henderson. "Thanks to investigations made by Mr. Sung, I was able to tell him precisely where Li-tsu's body now is. I proposed to the tao-tai that he should turn out his escort about three o'clock (that is a good hour before the Red Circle people intend to have the funeral), and let one of his officers himself conduct the affair, keep control of it, and prevent a parade round the town—in fact, get the ceremony over as quickly and as quietly as possible. After some argument, he said he would do this. I only hope he will keep his word."

## THE RED CIRCLE

"But I do hope, Mr. Henderson," said Marker, earnestly, "that you will not think of so far relying on his very doubtful promise as to delay for one moment putting the ladies and children in safety on board my ship, and that you will then come on board yourself. Let us not run any foolish risks."

"I agree with Captain Marker," put in De Visser. "We are face to face with a great danger, and must make the best use of every hour."

"I agree also," said Henderson. "Let me tell you my plans and my reasons for them. My wife is in a nervous state that makes me anxious about her health. She is sometimes in a kind of panic about the children; and I made up my mind this morning that she must be sent on board the *Tai-shan* with the little ones, if only to calm her. In case the trouble passes over, she can come back again. Miss Kirby is less affected by the news. Her training and experience as a nurse steady her nerves. Now, I still believe that this threatening storm may pass over without bursting on us, and I don't want to precipitate an outbreak by showing signs of panic among us white people."

"But don't let us lose our chance for the sake of keeping up appearances," suggested Marker.

"Nothing of the kind," said Henderson. "I have told Père Gratien in my letter that Mr. de Visser will go immediately to the French mission house, and escort Lebrun in a palanquin, not to the steamer, but to the hotel. His removal to

## PREPARING FOR THE STORM

his old room there will seem quite natural. But then, if there is an outbreak he can at once go on board. I shall send Miss Kirby to the hotel, and go there myself for a while. She will be in charge of the patient. Every one in the town knows she helps with my patients. She remains there during the afternoon, till we see how things go. She, too, will be in easy reach of the *Tai-shan*."

"But what about Mrs. Henderson and the children?" asked the Captain.

"You may think I am taking unnecessary precautions," replied Henderson. "But I don't want a procession of sedan chairs going through the town, conveying my wife and children, with servants carrying their luggage, and the good old Chinese nurse carried in a palanquin after them. Before they were half-way through the town it would be reported we were all in flight, and Heaven knows but the Red Circle gang would attack them."

"I'll answer for their safety," said Marker. "I can bring some of my men to meet them, and we would clear the street in a twinkling if there was any attack."

"I am sure you would," answered the other. "But I want to avoid any chance of a street row, with my wife and children in the thick of it. You know the fishing village at the creek above the town, Marker?"

"Yes; you have your boat-house and a boat there. I remember our pleasant day there last summer."

## THE RED CIRCLE

“Well, I have not only the boat there, but also a Christian family that I am sure I can rely on—fisher-folk, good people. I have got ready the old curtained bullock wagon that we took the ladies down in last year, and have quietly put into it two portmanteaus and a box of medicines, instruments, and medical comforts. Mr. Sung and two of my people will start in half an hour with the wagon for the creek. Mrs. Henderson and the children, with the nurse, will go in it. They will spend the day in a native boat belonging to my fisher friends on the creek; and, in any case, at sundown I will ask you to send a boat up to escort them down to the *Tai-shan*. If there is any trouble sooner, the steamer can run up to the mouth of the creek (it's under two miles) and pick them up before going down the river. You see, in this way no one in the town will know that they are not here. Do you approve?”

“Yes,” said Marker. “I think it will work out all right. When are you yourself coming on board? I suppose you will wait at Shanghai Jack's.”

“I utterly dislike the idea of going at all,” replied Henderson. “Père Gratien refuses to go. Is it not so?”—and he looked at De Visser.

“My dear sir,” said De Visser, “Père Gratien himself agrees that you ought to go. He has spoken to me of you respectfully, I might almost say affectionately; for he recognizes the good work you are doing in your dispensary and hospital, and your zeal and charity. But—pardon

## PREPARING FOR THE STORM

my saying it—he agrees with me that your first duty is to your own people, and that you can be of great service on board the *Tai-shan* if she has to escape with the Europeans. Forgive my speaking as an adviser, but you are so generous that you may make a sacrifice that is not called for."

"What about those other people who look to me as their pastor?" said Henderson. "Père Gratien is staying with his flock, you tell me—"

"And he is making a bad mistake," interposed Marker. "I still think we should force him to come with us, if it can't be done any other way. He is too good a man to be knocked on the head by those Chinese skunks, and I feel ashamed of the idea of going away and leaving him in the middle of the row."

"Allow me—allow me!" said De Visser, holding up his hand. "First, it's no use trying to take Père Gratien away. And, then, he is not in such danger as you think. During all these years he has made himself almost a Chinaman. He can hide among his people; there are a dozen ways in which he can be safe among them. But there is no such chance for an Englishman or a Belgian who has not thus naturalized himself. After the talk of Li-tsueh being murdered here, this house may well be the first point of attack. Why not leave the excellent Mr. Sung in charge of the place, telling him to desert it and hide among the people when the trouble comes? You told me, sir, he was your assistant in your pastoral work,

## THE RED CIRCLE

that he would soon take Orders. He can do what the people ask in spiritual matters. Père Gratien will have no one to take his place in this way. And, then, think of your wife and children—her despair, her madness, if she is needlessly separated from you. I know—Captain Marker knows—that you go reluctantly, but it is the right thing to do."

"Yes, yes, De Visser is right!" said Marker, eagerly.

"I thank you both," said Henderson, "for all your friendly interest. I shall consider your reasons, and I shall not stay unless I see it is absolutely my duty to do so. Now let us end the debate. You, Monsieur de Visser, had better go at once to the French station and see to the removal of Lebrun. Captain Marker, if he can stay here, will see the party start for the creek, and then go with me and Miss Kirby to visit Monsieur Lebrun at the hotel."

So the council ended. De Visser started for Père Gratien's. Marker met the ladies, and encouraged Mrs. Henderson with optimistic views of the outlook, and promised her a pleasant time on the *Tai-shan*.

"Let us call it a little river party," he said. "My friend Mac will be pleased to have the children with him for a while. I am afraid he will be loading up all our forehold with bonbons and preserves for them."

## CHAPTER IX

### AT THE MISSION STATION

WHILE the "council of war" was in progress at Mr. Henderson's house, Père Gratien, after a very busy morning, had at last found time for a talk with Lebrun. He had slipped into his room for a moment at an early hour to assure himself that he was going on well; and he had been pleased to find that, thanks to youth and a good constitution, the Belgian, though still very weak, was on the fair way to a rapid recovery.

Then he had said his Mass. The mission chapel had a much larger congregation than was generally to be found there on week-day mornings. Rumors had already spread vaguely among the native Christians that there was danger at hand, and they came before and after Mass to ask the priest to hear their confessions. It was a long time before he could leave them, and even then he had to tell many to come later.

After a hurried breakfast he had sent the catechist Paul to carry out Li-tsu's funeral, paid his official visit to the tao-tai, received Paul's report of the action of the Red Circle, interviewed

## THE RED CIRCLE

De Visser, and sent information by him to Captain Marker, and by letter to Mr. Henderson. Then he had again spent some time in the church with his people. At eleven o'clock he went back to his house, and to save time had his lunch carried into the room where the injured man lay. They could have the meal together, he said.

So far he had told him nothing of the rumors that were current, but the communication could not be much longer delayed. During the meal he broke the news to his guest, affecting to make light of it, but adding that, in any case, they must take all precautions while there was yet time. Then he told him that the Europeans would go on board the *Tai-shan* if a rising took place; and, in order that this refuge might be secured to Lebrun, he would be removed that day to the "hotel" on the river-bank, where Mr. Henderson would meet him, and a boat would be ready to take him on board the steamer at the first sign of real danger. He ended by remarking:

"I shall be very sorry to say adieu; for I would be delighted to keep you here."

Lebrun looked surprised.

"But it is not adieu," he said. "Surely you are coming with us, *mon Père*?"

"I have to stay here, my son," answered Père Gratien. "But you will be in good hands, with your friend Monsieur de Visser and the others."

"No, no!" said Lebrun. "You will come with us. Why stay here to lose your life?"

"I must stay with my people," replied the priest,

## AT THE MISSION STATION

in his matter-of-fact tone. "You know the word of our Master. Well, for want of a better, I am the shepherd of this little flock, and cannot desert it. 'The good Shepherd giveth his life for his sheep.' I don't say I am a particularly *good* shepherd, but I am the shepherd, and I must stay and take the risk—which, for that matter, may not be so great."

"I don't know much of Scripture texts," observed Lebrun. "I am a practical man, Father. Quite apart from the affection I feel for you after all your touching kindness to me, I venture to say would it not be wiser to save your life instead of throwing it away; and then come back when order is restored, to do more of your work here, just as I and De Visser will come back to lay out the new line?"

"Well," said the priest, "I will not quote Scripture. I will use a language that you will understand at once. I am a soldier stationed here, and a soldier remains at his post till he is relieved or ordered back, even if he dies to hold it. I must say, like MacMahon at the Malakoff, '*J'y suis, J'y reste*'—'Here I am, and here I stay.'"

"But surely you know what the end will be if there is a rising. It has happened elsewhere. You will be cut to pieces by a wild mob of mad fanatics. It is horrible. You don't realize what it means. Are you not afraid?"

"Yes, my son, I am afraid. I don't pretend to be a hero. I don't try to realize it. Frankly, I try to keep my mind off it. I am sure when the

## THE RED CIRCLE

time comes I shall be given strength to bear whatever is to be. We must all die sooner or later. If death comes this way, it is a better death than I ever dared to hope for—except sometimes long ago, when I was young like you and enthusiastic."

Lebrun, propped up on his couch, stared at the pictures on the wall, but he did not see them. He was thinking if there was not a way out. Then he spoke:

"But if you must stay, if you will not go, what need is there of dying like a sheep without a struggle? See here, Father! I am half a Frenchman. My father was a soldier. I will not leave you alone to die."

"But, my son, consider—"

"Let me speak—I must speak on," said Lebrun, flushing with feverish excitement. "I am weak, but not too weak to pull a trigger. De Visser will think as I do. Those Flemings are slow, but when they are roused they can fight. He fought the other day. Then there are your Christians, hard-handed workingmen. De Visser will stand by. Barricade the place; arm your people, if only with cudgels and knives, and let us make a fight of it. If we hold on only for a few days, relief will come from somewhere."

The priest took his hand and pressed it.

"Calm yourself, my son," he said. "It is brave and generous of you to think like this. But believe me it would be useless. I cannot hear of it."

"I know what you are thinking of," said

## AT THE MISSION STATION

Lebrun. "As a priest, you do not believe in resistance, but you must let us others, the mere laymen, protect you, just as if the tao-tai did his duty you would not refuse his armed protection."

"It is not that," replied Père Gratien. "I do not say for one moment that, if a successful resistance could be organized, it would not be right to defend the lives of the Christians—to prevent their being slaughtered like sheep by a mob. But resistance is utterly impossible. Look round the room! We are in a house built of wood and bamboo and paper, dried in the sun till it is like tinder, with outbuildings thatched with straw. The mob would burn us out in five minutes. I must stay here and try to use what influence I have to avert the danger from my people. If I fail, I must stay among them in any case—perhaps not here, but hiding among them. After all, my life may be spared. If my people could go with me, I might 'flee to another city'; but they cannot. I must stay with them."

"Then De Visser and I will stay," said Lebrun.

"No, no! It would be wrong for me to risk the life of yourself or any other of the Europeans. And by staying here I can perhaps do something for you all; for my remaining may keep the leaders of the Red Circle occupied."

At this point De Visser entered. Lebrun appealed to him to use his influence to persuade Père Gratien to go away with them. Lebrun's very weakness, the fever in his blood, made him urge his arguments with fierce energy. But, to

## THE RED CIRCLE

his disappointment, De Visser sided with Père Gratien, and tried to calm his friend:

*“Tiens, mon ami,”* he said. “You will tire yourself out and make yourself ill. Let us take care of you. You must keep quiet. Père Gratien has to stay here, but there is no reason why he should be left alone. You would stay, but an invalid with the best of good will would not reinforce the garrison. I shall come back and act for both of us.”

“No,” said the priest, firmly. “As I have already explained to our friend here, that is out of the question. I thank you both from the depths of my heart for your devoted courage and friendship for me. God will bless you for it, and take the will for the deed. But your lives must not be risked uselessly. With me it is different.”

“Yes, Father,” said De Visser. “Of course you stay. But let me have the supreme honor of staying with you. Surely I am as much one of your people as those Chinese converts. I have a claim to be allowed to stay.”

He spoke very quietly, as if it were all a matter of course. The son of the Flemish farmer had a thousand years of Catholic blood in his humble line of ancestry. There was the traditional reverence for the priest, undimmed by what Lebrun would have called “enlightened ideas.” His people, plain peasant folk, had given priests to the missionary Congregation of Aerschot; a cousin of his was at work among them in central Africa. In the last generation, two more who bore

## AT THE MISSION STATION

his name had worn the gray uniform of the Zouaves of Pius IX. Without a flush of enthusiasm, but in the matter-of-fact way characteristic of his race, he thought, as the simplest thing in the world, that if the priest and the altar were in danger, he must share the peril, not even waiting to think out how he could be of use. It was almost an instinctive feeling—a resolution taken without entering into details or making plans.

“Yes, you are one of my people,” said the priest; “and so you must obey me and do what I consider best for all. You will take care of Lebrun. You will convey my letters to the Vicar Apostolic. You will come back with help. If I am still here, it will be a happy reunion. If not, while doing your work, you will aid my successor to rebuild the mission, and you will use your influence to help and protect what are left of my people. In this way you will do far more for me than if you stayed here.”

But Lebrun broke in: “It is terrible to hear you talking so calmly, and De Visser taking it as a matter of course, and to lie here helpless and be unable to do anything. It is a misfortune—so different from what I hoped for! I thought to do something, *mon Père*, to repay you for your kindness; and the good English *pasteur*, too. I may be able to do something for him, but for you it is too late. It will all be over—” And his voice broke into a weak, complaining tone.

De Visser looked at him pityingly as he lay back on his pillows.

## THE RED CIRCLE

"Comrade," he said, taking his hand, "you can, all the same, do something to make the good Father happy, and me, too, and yourself. We are all in danger—those who stay and those who go. Who knows what a few hours will bring? I am going to put my accounts in order—to make my confession. Why should not you do the same?"

"But you forget. I am not a Catholic. Why should I?" asked Lebrun, coldly.

"You are not a Catholic! You have been baptized, is it not so?"

"Yes, I was baptized at Ste. Gudule. I even made my First Communion there. I remember the fête—walking in the procession with the white rosette on my arm. It was the thing to do, and it was done. But it was the only time. If I had married in Belgium, I suppose I should have gone to church again for the sake of my wife, as I went as a boy for my mother's sake. She died, and my father had modern ideas; and at the University —*voyez vous* —we did not worry about such things. We were anti-clericals in my circle, and I have forgotten most of it. I don't want to pain you, Father, but it is best to speak plainly. When I am well again, I shall think; and if there is anything in it—who knows? But this is not the time for abstruse discussions; and as for confession, even if I believed, it would be a long business."

"No," said the priest, "it would be a very simple matter. I would help you. If you only believed, it would be a matter of a few minutes.

## AT THE MISSION STATION

You would not fear to speak freely to me, and you would be sorry for any errors in your life. Is it not so?"

"For that matter," answered Lebrun, "I wish I had made a better business of my life. There are things I am not proud of, when I look back. But one must believe, and I am no believer, though I believe more than I did an hour ago."

"Well, that is something," said Père Gratien, encouragingly.

"Yes," continued Lebrun, "I believe there may be something in a religion that makes you, *mon Père*, look so calmly at death, and wait for it for the sake of a crowd of stupid Chinese workmen; and, in a way, also for a fellow like me, who comes from nowhere in particular and has no claim on you; and for the *pasteur*, who opposes you. You stay, and help us to go. Mind you, I don't say risking one's life is much. *Ma foi!* I have done it for my work, for sport, in a duel; and I would take my chance to-morrow or to-day with a weapon in my hand. But to sit down and wait to be crushed out! That's something different."

"We must go soon," said De Visser, quietly. "I will retire to your study for a few minutes' preparation, and then will you come and hear my confession?"

"Certainly, *mon enfant!*" replied Père Gratien.

And De Visser went out of the room. He had chosen the moment in order to leave the priest and his friend alone together.

## THE RED CIRCLE

Seated by the couch, Père Gratien asked Lebrun to think of what his mother had taught him, and try to pray.

"You still believe more than you realize, my dear friend," he said, kindly. "Let me help you and give you the best of all blessings, peace with God, before we part."

"Don't urge me further," answered the other. "I can't think now. Pray for me. I shall think later on. I shall not forget you. It may be different then. One cannot change whole years in a moment. I used to talk against priests and religion, but I shall never do so again. There is that much of repentance. Be satisfied with it. When they say that priests are shams, I shall think of one who is a reality. I shall talk to De Visser about it all. I am too tired now to talk or think."

This was all that Père Gratien's pleading could win from him. But it might be a beginning of better things to come. The priest, saying he would soon return, left the room. In a few minutes he came back with De Visser. Then Paul, the catechist, came in with a message that the palanquin was ready in the courtyard. The time had come to part.

Supported by the priest and De Visser, Lebrun was helped out. As he lay in the curtained palanquin the priest grasped his hand.

"You will not forget your promise. You will think. You will talk sincerely to your friend. I shall pray for you."

## AT THE MISSION STATION

“Yes; I have promised,” came the answer.  
“And now let it be *au revoir*, not adieu.”

Père Gratien bent over him, making the Sign of the Cross and pronouncing the words of blessing.

“God bless you, my son! It is *à Dieu*, for we both belong to God, even though you hardly know it; and it is *au revoir*, for we shall surely meet again, though it may not be in this world.”

He pressed his hand and dropped the curtain as the bearers raised the litter. They paused a moment, for De Visser had fallen on his knees to ask the priest’s blessing. Père Gratien raised him and embraced him in his foreign fashion, and turned back to the house hurriedly, for he feared to show all he felt.

De Visser watched him disappear at the doorway, and then gave the word to start, wondering if he had seen the last of one whom, though he had known him only for so short a time, he counted the best of friends.

## CHAPTER X

### AT SHANGHAI JACK'S HOTEL

ALONG a rough, dusty by-road that led through the fields toward the fishing village on the creek above the town a curtained bullock cart rumbled through the noonday heat. Inside sat Mrs. Henderson, with her children and the nurse. Little Herbert and Ida thought it was a holiday excursion, and were delighted at the prospect of a day on the river. Mr. Sung, sheltered under a paper umbrella, and full of the grave responsibility of escorting his teacher's family, tramped by the wagon, having sent on in advance a trusted servant, mounted on a shaggy pony, to have all ready for their arrival.

Having seen the party safely off, and noticed with satisfaction that the departure of the bullock cart had attracted no particular attention in the neighborhood, Henderson, Marker, and Miss Kirby started for the town on their way to Shanghai Jack's hotel. The girl had refused the offer of a sedan chair or a palanquin. She had often walked through the town on a hotter day, she said, and without so good an escort. Her

## AT SHANGHAI JACK'S HOTEL

cheerful courage delighted her brother-in-law, and still more her suitor, who was pleased to feel she was now depending on him for safety.

No one who saw the party would have imagined that all three knew that before sunset they might be face to face with the most hideous dangers. It is a happy circumstance that, even with people of only average nerve and courage, there is little sense of fear so long as they have some active work to occupy their minds, even though they know danger and death may not be far off—especially if the danger comes in a form that they have long contemplated as a possibility. Thus I have seen men, and young recruits, too, marching to their first battle, and apparently forgetting that any trying experience was so near them; occupied only with the anxiety as to whether they could get a rest and something to eat and drink on the toilsome march, and chatting about trifles as they tramped along.

Here all three were doing their best to keep a cool head and a brave heart; and the mere assumption of calm indifference to danger reacts on the mind and helps to steady the nerves. It was reassuring, too, to find that the shopkeepers in the long main street were attending to their business as if nothing were the matter; and gave them friendly salutes, and replied courteously to Mr. Henderson's greetings to those he recognized.

Shanghai Jack was profuse in his welcome, and told them he had prepared his best room for the reception of Lebrun, whom he expected every

## THE RED CIRCLE

moment. He placed chairs under the veranda. He brought a wonderful concoction of soda-water flavored with red pomegranate juice, and asked if "Mees Kelbee" would like tea instead. He had "fine chop tea," he explained.

Marker pointed out the *Tai-shan*, with the wood-barges beside her, and the coolies and Mac-Murdo's men working at the extra rate of speed inspired by the promise of double pay. The ring of hammers came across the water. The new bulwarks were being fitted.

"There are no flies on Mac," said Marker. "Look, there he is waving his cap to us!" And he took off his helmet and returned the salute. "It's good to see the old flag flying on the ship," he continued, pointing to the red ensign that trailed lazily from the flagstaff. "The *Tai-shan* is just a bit of England moored off Cheng-foo. When you step on to her deck, Miss Kirby, you must say, 'Now I am home again.'"

"But China will be my home for many a long day, I hope," said Edith, gravely.

"And mine, too," observed Marker. "That need not make any difference."

The girl turned abruptly, and began to busy herself with the tea-tray that Shanghai Jack had brought. He was waiting in person on such honored guests.

And then De Visser appeared, followed by the palanquin that conveyed Lebrun. The patient was somewhat fatigued with the excitement of learning that danger was so near, and then

## AT SHANGHAI JACK'S HOTEL

urging his own views on Père Gratien and De Visser before he consented to be removed from the mission station. Short as the journey through the town had been, it had added to his temporary exhaustion. De Visser was alarmed at his friend's partial collapse under the strain, and was pleased to be able to confide him to Mr. Henderson's and Miss Kirby's experienced hands.

He drew the clergyman aside to report that during the journey from the mission station his party had been for a moment in danger. A group of idlers had yelled what the catechist recognized as insulting and threatening cries, and mud and stones had been thrown. But his people had kept steadily on their way, and the attack had gone no further. No one had been hurt, but it was an unpleasant sign that the population of one-quarter of Cheng-foo was becoming hostile.

Lebrun was laid on a couch in a large airy room looking on the river. The clergyman administered a restorative, and the patient soon revived. Then, leaving him in charge of Miss Kirby and De Visser, Henderson went back to the veranda, where he found Marker in consultation with Shanghai Jack.

The hotel-keeper's whole attitude of mind was one of friendship for the Europeans. He had a keen business interest in their undertakings. Marker's enterprise in running the *Tai-shan* regularly between I-chang and Cheng-foo had secured for the place a reliable mail service and increased its trade. The coming of the railway,

## THE RED CIRCLE

with which the Belgians were associated, would make the town an important river port; and Shanghai Jack, as the pioneer hotel proprietor and storekeeper on a large scale, would be a great man. Further, as one who had lived among the European traders all his life, the Shanghai man almost considered himself one of them, and looked on the Cheng-foo people as ignorant provincials.

Marker had known him long enough to feel that he could be trusted. He used to say that Shanghai Jack was about the only Chinaman he would trust any farther than he could watch him. He had, therefore, told him plainly what the Europeans feared, and added that on the first sign of an outbreak they would go down the river with him on the *Tai-shan*. He reminded him of the promise he had made to De Visser to be on the alert and try to collect information.

"See here, Jack!" he said to him. "It's no good your telling us nothing is going to happen. We know the scum of the town will be raising h—— before we are much older. All I want to know is just when the row is going to begin. I don't like running away; but if I must run, I don't mean to run before there is real live danger. You get me news—correct information—the straight tip, savvy? as they say in the Shanghai Club—and I pay you well for it."

"I don't want pay," replied the Chinaman. "My game is your game, Captain, right thloo. You know that velly well. I have two men out now, looking out up-town. They come soon tell

## AT SHANGHAI JACK'S HOTEL

me something. I say: 'Don't come tell me no wildcat tales. Just wait till you know something, then come.' Nothing happen yet, you bet, or they come."

Henderson joined them. He began talking in Chinese to the hotel-keeper. Marker listened impatiently. At last he asked:

"What does it all come to when it's boiled down?"

Henderson explained that the Chinaman was taking an optimistic view and did not expect anything serious. If there were a rising in preparation, he would have learned all about it before this.

"I hope he is right," the clergyman continued. "But, then, we must not forget that he is almost as much a stranger in the place as we are. They may be keeping him in the dark and they may have found out that his servants who are making inquiries are our spies."

Shanghai Jack listened, and interposed presently with an explanation.

"No fear I make mistake, sirs. I no send my own men—my men Shanghai men. I send two Cheng-foo men—two confounded blackguards, sirs. But I have pull on them; can make them do what I want. I know 'nough to make tao-tai cut off their heads if they play me any bad game. See?"

"Set a thief to catch a thief! Is that the plan?" said the clergyman. "But I'm afraid your two rascals may be in so bad a fix that they would rather help on the rising than do anything to upset it."

## THE RED CIRCLE

Shanghai Jack grinned.

"I know play game," he said. "And here comes one of my blackguards. I don't talk him here, or he tell lies. I take him inside house. He no tell his tale before Eulopeans. See?"

The man who came lounging up wore the uniform of the yamen guard. He stared at the two white men and seemed to hesitate; but Shanghai Jack, addressing him in Chinese, invited him to come into the hotel and have a drink. The two Chinamen disappeared into the house.

"There's information direct from headquarters," said the clergyman. "I suppose Jack has found out that this fellow has been robbing the tao-tai and losing the money at fan-tan in the back parlor here. That's the pull he has on him."

"Likely enough," answered Marker. "Anyhow, I trust our Shanghai friend. But I am wondering if he does not run some risk of having his own show burned if the row comes. A lot of the local traders are jealous enough of him."

"Even so," said Henderson, "I imagine Jack will know how to take care of himself. At the worst, he has a reserve fund buried somewhere. He will claim compensation from the Government—and, what is more, he will get it. But I don't think it will come to that. He lends money and has half the traders here in his clutches, and could ruin them if he turned nasty. If we have to go, and live to come back to Cheng-foo, Shanghai Jack will be here to welcome us."

## AT SHANGHAI JACK'S HOTEL

The Chinaman came out of the hotel without the guardsman.

"Send him off by back lane," he explained. "He say tao-tai in blue funk. Stay in yamen himself. Send men up-town to funeral of Li-tsu. Bad job, sirs. Should let bury Li-tsu and make no fuss."

"Oh, that's all right! I arranged it with him myself," said the clergyman.

"You no savvy game tao-tai play," broke out Shanghai Jack. "Only Chinaman know. European only see half the game."

Henderson, with a change of tone that showed he did not quite like Shanghai Jack's assumption of superior wisdom, spoke to him in Chinese, asking him to tell him in his own language what he meant. Marker had to wait till what seemed to his impatient ears a very long story had been told with much vigorous gesture by the Chinaman, and was summarized and interpreted by the clergyman.

It amounted to this. The tao-tai was anxious to prevent an outbreak, but was afraid to challenge the chiefs of the Red Circle, especially as he was not at all sure that they were not acting on instructions from the authorities at Peking, who might be using the secret societies for their own purpose, with the option of disavowing them if the movement miscarried and the Europeans got the upper hand in the coast provinces. Instead, therefore, of sending a party to get possession of Li-tsu's remains and bury him as quickly

## THE RED CIRCLE

as possible, so as to prevent the funeral being made the pretext of a demonstration against the Europeans, he was simply sending an armed party to keep order, and allowing the Red Circle men to conduct the ceremony. Shanghai Jack thought the only result would be to encourage the chiefs of the secret society, who would represent the party from the yamen as a kind of guard of honor sent to add dignity to their proceedings.

Marker, in his indignation at this cowardice and duplicity, forgot for the moment the Chinaman's presence and his own respect for the Rev. James Henderson's official calling.

"D—— the squint-eyed old heathen!" he exclaimed, bringing his clenched fist down on the table and making the glasses on it dance and ring. "I have half a mind to get my men ashore, carry him off to the *Tai-shan*, hold him as a hostage, and tell him he will be hanged or shot if the scum of the town tries on any nonsense. That would make him send very precise orders to his crowd to keep the mob down. By Jove! it's a good plan! What do you say, Henderson?"

"It would be a piece of madness," replied the clergyman, gravely. "You must keep your head level."

He looked anxiously at the Chinaman to see what impression this wild proposal had made on him. Shanghai Jack's yellow face had relaxed into a broad grin of frank enjoyment.

"It's a good idea, sirs!" he exclaimed. "First-chop plan! Only we too few. I want to help, sirs,

## AT SHANGHAI JACK'S HOTEL

with my people, if it could be done. Yes, glad to help. But we too few, and gunboats too far down Yang-tse."

"I'm afraid you're right, Jack," said Marker, regretfully. "It would be a fine game to hold up the Mandarin of Cheng-foo, if we could do it. I wish I had taken the advice of the lieutenant that commands the gunboats at Hankow. He wanted me to stiffen the upper deck of the *Tai-shan*, and mount a pompon and a pair of Maxims on it. I was a fool when I told him we were traders, not fighting-men, on board my little ship."

"Pardon me!" put in Henderson. "But these reminiscences and suggestions are taking us away from business. What are we going to do here and now? I think I had better go back to my place and see what I can do to protect my people there and the property of the mission."

Shanghai Jack struck in with a suggestion:

"You stay my hotel, sir. Let me send bling down-town Mrs. Henderson and the chillen. When they safe here, Mista Sung let yamen know no Eulopeans at house; send all China boys away; shut up house; tell tao-tai if house burn, plovince have to pay some day; his pidgin [business] keep house safe. See?"

Shanghai Jack's English, though disguised by defective grammar, an elliptical style, and the Chinese tendency to substitute *l* for *r*, was sufficiently intelligible. Marker explained to him that Mrs. Henderson and the children were already in safety elsewhere, and expressed his approval

## THE RED CIRCLE

of the idea of leaving to Mr. Sung the responsibility of sending away the native servants, and shutting up the house, and letting the tao-tai know that it was his duty to protect it from being sacked and burned; and that, if he failed, the province of Sze-chuan and the good town of Cheng-foo would have to pay the bill sooner or later.

Turning to Henderson, he continued:

"I hope you will agree to this and send Sung his orders by letter. Shanghai Jack will get your letter through to the house. Instead of going there yourself, you had better take one of my boats—I can spare one with a couple of good men—pull up to the creek and bring Mrs. Henderson and the rest down to the *Tai-shan*."

Marker made the suggestion not so much because he thought there was any real need of embarking the clergyman's wife and children so soon, as because he was anxious to give Henderson some active occupation that would prevent him from going back to the mission station. He feared that if he once returned there, he might stay.

Henderson thought for a few moments, and then said he agreed that the plan was the right one, but he added:

"Can't we work the French mission the same way—get the Padre away to the steamer, and leave his catechist to look after everything?"

"It ought to work," answered Marker. "Now go and see your patient. Give Miss Kirby any directions that are needful about him, and write

## AT SHANGHAI JACK'S HOTEL

your orders for Mr. Sung. I'll slip over to the *Tai-shan*, see how Mac is getting on with his preparations, and bring the boat back for you. It's a pleasure to be doing instead of talking. Call a native boat to the bund steps for me, Jack. I'll be back in five minutes."

He lit another cigar, put on his helmet, and walked across to the steps that ran down to the river. Henderson glanced admiringly at his sailor friend. His athletic figure, his sunburnt face, the alert look in his eyes, the unconcerned attitude of the man, who stood puffing his cigar as if there were no anxiety on his mind, no dangers to be faced, and who had just now casually suggested turning the tables on the *tao-tai* by a daring *coup-de-main*, which he regarded as a school-boy looks on a holiday escapade—all this made him feel Marker was the type of man that for three centuries had enabled handfuls of white men, Europeans or Americans, to dominate millions of the dark-faced races. While there were plenty of such men to be found in every seaport, garrison town, and trading-station of the Far East, could any sane man believe the talk of the croakers who said the day of the white man was passing, the day of the yellow races near at hand?

So he went in to see his patient with a new sense of safety for them all; and with a hope, too, that his fellow-missionary of another faith would be saved with the rest, by some bold stroke of the enterprising Marker and dogged, cool-headed De Visser.

## CHAPTER XI

### WHAT DE VISSER EXPLAINED TO CAPTAIN MARKER

"YE'RE a sight for sair een!" cried MacMurdo, relapsing into his native broad Scots in the strong feeling of the moment, as he saw Marker again on the deck of the *Tai-shan*. "It's a wee bit dreary out here all by oneself, I tell ye. But the wark goes on brawly."

Marker told him the news from the town, ordered a boat to be got ready to take him back, and then to be at Mr. Henderson's disposal, and took a hurried look round the steamer.

MacMurdo had succeeded in inspiring something of his own energy into deck crew, engine-room hands, and the coolies of the lighters. Bulwarks of tough planking had been fitted along the side rails forward; the wheel and the commander's station were protected by a breastwork of logs; and a V-shaped fender of solid timber was ready to be dropped over the bows to strengthen the *Tai-shan* forward, "in case we have to ram and run down a junk or two," as MacMurdo explained. A little brass gun, originally intended for signaling purposes, had been mounted on a plank platform on the foredeck.

## DE VISSER EXPLAINS

"It's not up to much for long-range firing," said MacMurdo; "but, if we fight, I reckon it will be like Nelson—at very close quarters. I have looked up some old scrap metal—bits of bolts and nuts and washers, and a lot of nails and spikes, and some lead that one of the boys has cut up into slugs; and I have made them up into charges in paper bags. And I've amused myself filling some cartridges with good black powder. I got the steward to sew the cartridge-bags, and cut up an old shirt or two for the stuff. He's handy with his needle. If any of those Johnnies try to board the ship we can give them a whiff of old iron and scrap right in their faces at twenty yards. That will cool their courage. It was a bit of a nuisance handling the powder. I like to smoke over my work, but I thought it was safer not to have a cigar going during that job."

"I had no idea you were such a fire-eater, Mac," said Marker, laughing. "You positively revel in the idea of a fight."

"Every Scotsman is a fighting-man by nature," said the engineer. "While we were a proudly independent people, Highlanders and Lowlanders and Borderers were always fighting among themselves like wildcats, when they were not too busy fighting your people. Have you never read Walter Scott? Then, since we became partners with you Southrons, our Scots regiments have won all your battles for you. Even the Irish—and they're wild fellows enough—could only get a look in now and then. Fighting is in the Scots'

## THE RED CIRCLE

blood, only we are a bit canny and don't fight till there's need for it. But when the need comes, it's worth living for a man to have the chance."

"How's the coaling going on—or the *wooding*, to be more accurate?"

"We have a lot of the stuff and most of the extra stores on board, and that big barge-load of sticks lying by there to take in tow if we want it. The fires are going nicely. I'm not wasting fuel—just keeping the boilers so as we can run up pressure in a few minutes. Here's the boat ready, and two of our best boys at the oars. I shall be on the lookout for the ladies, and keep the other boat ready to go to the bund if you signal for it. We have got everything shipshape; and if we have to run for it, we shall get away nicely. Don't you worry about that."

"I don't mean to worry, so long as I have you to help me, Mac. I sha'n't forget all this. As I told you, this run means a lot for me."

He dropped into the boat that lay alongside, waved his hand to the engineer as she pushed off, and then took the tiller lines and steered for the bund, sitting back in the shadow of the little awning over the stern-sheets, with a look of thorough contentment on his bronzed face.

Having landed, he sent Mr. Henderson away up-river; telling him, as a last word of advice, that he had better bring his people down to the *Tai-shan* on board the large, roomy sailing-craft that belonged to the Christian fishermen at the creek. Mrs. Henderson and her children would

## DE VISSER EXPLAINS

be more comfortable under the thatched awning of the native boat than in his own little craft. The Chinese boat could be poled out of the creek, and then sail down, with the current helping the light breeze that blew from the up-river gorges. He stood watching the boat as the two sailors bent to the oars, and the clergyman, an old oarsman of college days, steered her cleverly through the tangle of native craft that lay near the bund. Then he turned into the hotel.

Up the matted staircase he went to Lebrun's room, where he found the patient looking himself again; and De Visser and Edith Kirby, the latter wearing her nurse's apron and cap, chatting with him and cheering him up. He thought Edith looked prettier than ever in her professional guise, and but for the others would have been tempted to tell her so. Instead, he spoke of what had been done and arranged, and ended with the suggestion that, as they might soon be busy and the day was getting on, the best thing to do now would be to have some lunch. Would De Visser and Miss Kirby come down and take it with him? They would send up a tray to Lebrun. But Edith refused to leave her patient. Let them send up a light luncheon for two. De Visser would be the Captain's guest, and to this arrangement of the party Marker had to agree.

"Perhaps it is better we are to be alone," he said to the Belgian as they went down-stairs together. "I almost forgot I had some serious matters to talk over with you."

## THE RED CIRCLE

"No bad news, I hope?"

"No; everything is going on all right. I want to talk about the French Padre. It sticks in my throat to leave him. I have a plan that we can discuss over our lunch. Let me give Jack his orders first."

They were soon seated at a table at one end of the veranda. A lattice screen of carved-work hid them from the view of the passers-by on the bund, and yet gave them glimpses of the river. A punka overhead made a cool current of air. It was a comfortable corner—a pleasant refuge from the glare and heat of the wide quay outside.

Marker put it to De Visser that they ought to arrange for Père Gratien to hand everything over to his Chinese catechist—"that solemn chap, Paul," was the Captain's description of him—just as Mr. Henderson was leaving everything in charge of "the Bible-reading chap, Sung." Then the priest could come with them on the *Tai-shan*.

"He won't leave things to Paul. He can't do it," was De Visser's disappointing reply.

But Marker would not let the idea be thus summarily dismissed, and he pressed his point:

"Just consider it a minute or two, anyhow. We have to think it out for the Padre. Of course he wants to stick to his post; so did Henderson. I like them both the better for it. But my experience is that parsons of all kinds are not practical men, like us laymen who have to run up against the hard facts of life every day. I know Sung will manage better than Henderson

## DE VISSER EXPLAINS

would, or any European. He's a Chinaman. Blood is thicker than water, as we say, even among those yellow-faced rascals. With the Hendersons away, the crowd won't be so wild against their Chinese servants, Sung included; and he'll patch up some arrangement. You'll see he will—"

"But we are talking of Père Gratien," interrupted De Visser.

"Yes, of course. I am only talking of Sung and Henderson just to help you to grip my idea about Paul and the Frenchman. If the Padre consents to come with us, Paul will manage up at the French place just as Sung will at the English hospital. So far as I can judge Chinamen, and from the little I have seen of this chap Paul, I should say he is a cool, long-headed fellow. I dare say while the Padre is here he will want to show he has no pidgin [business] relations with the Chinese crowd. But leave him to himself and give him a free hand, and he will play his own game with them; and if any one can keep them from making hay of the Padre's place, old Paul will."

"I am afraid," said De Visser, with a hesitating tone, "that I cannot quite explain the situation to you. I do not think Père Gratien is staying on any point of honor, or, still less, only to protect the mission property. Let me try to show you his point of view. You know he has been here for years; he has made himself like one of the Chinese, adopted everything except their heathen customs,

## THE RED CIRCLE

and made a number of converts, for whom he is much more than a preacher or adviser."

"I have always my doubts about those converts," observed Marker. "Don't mind my saying so, De Visser. I've been longer in China than you have, and I have always found that those people will say anything to get a little advantage out of a European. Henderson is a right good chap, but he does not realize that he has got his small crowd of converts because he runs the dispensary. What does Père Gratien do for his lot? There must be some reason."

"Believe me or not, as you like, I don't think I am mistaken when I tell you he is too poor himself to do anything material for them. I dare say that out of his poverty he sometimes relieves one poorer than himself. Even the beggars in Belgium help one another, for that matter. As for his converts, instead of his giving to them, they keep up the church and pay some of the other mission expenses. He gets very little from Europe. I knew it was so hard for him even to provide for Lebrun that I insisted on paying some of the expense. No; his people are sincere, and prove it. And, mind you, I don't say some of Henderson's people are not sincere, even though he *has* the dispensary. They are wise enough to know he is not here to make money by it; and they know, too, that if he set up as a doctor and took fees he could make a fortune."

"Well, granted, for the sake of getting on with our talk, that the Padre's converts are not what

## DE VISSER EXPLAINS

the Shanghai people call 'rice Christians': let's take it they are all in earnest. Is not that one reason more for leaving them to run the mission on their own hook, with Paul, for a week or two?"

"That's where I cannot explain. They must have, not a catechist or a preacher, but their priest with them. It will be a hard time for them. It is very likely that if the Red Circle chiefs get the upper hand they will delight in trying to terrorize them into apostasy. It has happened elsewhere. Now, Père Gratien is their priest. He must be with them, not only to share their danger and exhort them to constancy, but also to do his office as a priest: give them the last absolution, say Mass for them if they can keep together—in fact, be their father, their priest, to the last. You are not a Catholic; you will not see the force of this. But I understand, and I should be astonished if he acted otherwise, just as you would be astonished at a captain abandoning his crew and escaping by himself in a shipwreck."

"I'll take your word for it," said Marker. "I suppose it's no use trying to alter your views and his; but it is hard lines to leave a first-rate fellow like the Padre to be murdered in the middle of all this Chinese scum. I wish Paul could take it on for him, like Sung is doing at the other chapel. But perhaps Paul is not so reliable."

"I am sure," replied De Visser, "that Père Gratien would never have chosen and kept Paul as his right-hand man unless he was thoroughly

## THE RED CIRCLE

good and reliable. But Paul is only a layman. With Mr. Henderson it is different. Mr. Sung can do all that he does as a pastor—read the prayers, exhort the converts, console them if they are dying. He even has some medical knowledge. He really replaces his chief. Paul could not do this."

"Talk of the devil and he appears!" exclaimed Marker. "Here is the man himself."

As he spoke, the catechist entered the veranda. He moved with a slow, somewhat stately step, stopped at a respectful distance, and made a deep bow to De Visser. Then he stood statue-like, with his face, that showed the wrinkles of age, in expressionless repose, like a mask. The Englishman was rather irritated by what he took for affected solemnity. De Visser, though newer to China, had already learned that this reserve was a sign of respect. Paul had nothing to do but to deliver a message, and must show no token of interest in the doings of those he met while discharging his duty.

The Belgian rose and spoke to him in French. Marker, lighting a cigar, watched and listened without understanding. He saw the Chinaman's face become more animated as he spoke. Paul made quick explanatory gestures with his hands; and, after giving some papers to the Belgian, he went away.

De Visser turned back to the table.

"Letters from Père Gratien to his chief, the Vicar Apostolic, that is the missionary bishop,"

## DE VISSER EXPLAINS

he said, showing the sealed packet of papers, "and some mission documents he asks me to take care of."

"Any other message? Any news?"

"Yes: a verbal message that I am not on any account to try to rejoin him at the mission. There are unpleasant crowds gathering in the streets round about it. Paul was threatened as he went past them. He is going now to the yamen with a message asking for a guard, but says it will probably lead to no result."

Marker rose. "I have a good mind," he said, "to slip round to the yamen myself and talk some plain common sense to that infernal old heathen. The mischief is he does not understand even pidgin-English, and I would have to take an interpreter along; and the miserable Chinese Johnny would be afraid, and would tone down my remarks into milk-and-water nonsense. What do you think?"

"I think," answered the other, "that Mr. Henderson and Père Gratien in their interviews this morning have done all that is possible to rouse the magistrate to a sense of his duty; and that it would be useless for us to try to influence him further, if they have failed. They were able to speak his own language to him. I have no doubt you would put very forcible arguments; but, as you say, it is likely the interpreter would take care they never reached him."

"Suppose I take Shanghai Jack to interpret?"

"Would not the tao-tai feel offended at the inn-

## THE RED CIRCLE

keeper (excellent man, no doubt, but still—what shall we say?—a representative of not the best class) coming as it would seem as joint ambassador with yourself for the Europeans? What good would it do? And, then, it would very likely compromise Jack himself, who already is running certain risks by our making his house our headquarters."

"I dare say you are right. By the way, has this rascal at the yamen any one with him who can understand plain English?"

"I think," said De Visser, "Mr. Henderson told me that the tao-tai has a secretary who understands a little English, or professes to understand it, but his knowledge is limited. He cannot interpret a conversation, but he can study out an English document if he takes time."

"That's some satisfaction," replied Marker.

"Before we go I shall write the old scoundrel a letter, and tell him what will happen if he allows the French Padre to be murdered. By Jove! the rascal's pigtail will stand up on end when his secretary puzzles it out and reads it for him! I'll make it quite plain, so that the secretary Johnny won't mistake my meaning."

Shanghai Jack came out of the hotel. He looked nervous, and his nervousness made him more than ordinarily deferential. He had bad news, he said, from one of his emissaries. There was a crowd gathering with a red banner in the working-men's quarter. The traders were shutting up their shops along the main street. Would the

## DE VISSE R EXPLAINS

honorable gentlemen consider if it was not time to send the wounded engineer and the lady on board the steamer?

“You think the row is coming at last in earnest, sure?” asked Marker.

“Who can say?” replied the Chinaman, spreading out his hands. “May come now, or may not come till night. But not safe now. Bad work may begin any time now.”

“Then I’ll signal for Mac to send the boat,” said Marker. “And you, De Visser, go up-stairs and tell Miss Kirby to be ready to move her patient. We shall have a busy time. But I must find a minute or two to dash off that letter. I’ll make the old heathen sit up.”

Consoling himself for many disappointments by this thought, he went forward to the edge of the bund to signal to the *Tai-shan*, while De Visser went into the hotel to warn Miss Kirby and arrange with Shanghai Jack for the removal of Lebrun.

## CHAPTER XII

### ON BOARD THE "TAI-SHAN"

As the boat swept up to the bund, turning to come alongside of it against the sluggish current of the river, and the sailor in the bows drove his boat-hook into a rotting timber and brought the little craft neatly up to the steps and held her there, Marker glanced up and down the wharf to make sure that there would be no danger of the embarkation being interrupted.

All was absolutely peaceful. Coolie porters tramped along, carrying their double burdens slung at each end of a bamboo over their shoulders; idlers sat in the shadow of a wall, dozing in the afternoon heat; two boys were fishing at the edge of the bund; children stared over the bulwarks of junks moored near it; and a native trading-craft, bright with red and blue paint, was being hauled in by a string of men and women, who tugged at a bamboo fiber rope. Marker felt that the center of disturbance was elsewhere.

Two of Shanghai Jack's men brought out Lebrun, and carried him down to the boat. They were to go off to the *Tai-shan* and temporarily

## ON BOARD THE *TAI-SHAN*

join Captain Marker's crew; for, with so many passengers, the steward would want assistance; and if there was a fight, these two sturdy men from the coast might be useful.

Edith Kirby came out carrying some pillows and went quickly down the steps and arranged them in the stern of the boat; then, aided by Marker, she made Lebrun as comfortable as possible for the short voyage to the steamer. De Visser remained ashore to pack up a few things for himself and his comrade, and to hand over to the innkeeper the instruments and other property of the railway company, brought for the survey—now postponed till times were quieter.

Looking from the window, he saw the boat push off. A few of the loungers on the wharf were staring idly after her. The four oar blades rose and fell, flashing in the sun as they swept back over the water; and the boat shot quickly out into the river. He could see Marker steering, with Edith near him, leaning forward to talk to Lebrun.

Marker was jubilant at the idea that he was taking her on board the *Tai-shan*. The only thing that disturbed him was the sad look in her face as she turned her head and glanced back at the town. But he knew better than to offer any consolatory advice. He realized that she was thinking of the threatened ruin of the two missions, the fate of Père Gratien, the immediate danger of her own people. He felt that his own satis-

## THE RED CIRCLE

faction was a little selfish; but, then, he said to himself, "How can I help it?"

MacMurdo had made thoughtful preparations for the reception of the sick man. On the shady side of the ship, in the gangway between the deck-house and the side-rail, he had placed a bamboo arm-chair with a leg-rest that made it a couch, put a folded rug in readiness, hung a curtain at the side, and rigged up a paper screen with a pulley and counterpoise, so that one of the boys could work it as a punka and keep the air moving. Then he had brought out a little bamboo table; for how could any man, sick or well, be happy without somewhere to stand a tumbler?

He waited at the top of the short side-ladder to help the new arrivals on board. But Marker jumped onto the steps and gave Edith his hand. His was to be her first welcome to the *Tai-shan*. MacMurdo could only come second, with his hearty grip of the hand and an expression of pleasure that the *Tai-shan* could repay some of the hospitality of the mission station—"Only," he added, "it could be wished the circumstances were brighter."

Lebrun was lifted on board and carried to the place the engineer had prepared for him. MacMurdo proudly indicated his arrangements, and was rewarded by Edith saying, with a smile:

"You are as clever as you are kind, Mr. MacMurdo. Who would ever have thought of having a punka ready—and you so busy, too!"

## ON BOARD THE *TAI-SHAN*

She arranged the pillows for Lebrun, who settled himself comfortably in the long chair.

"This is the best place to be," he murmured, as if to himself.

"Yes, you are right. You are almost as good as back in Europe here," said Marker. "And we shall have more friends on board presently. I think I see the other boat pulling down-stream and the fisher junk after her. Come forward, Miss Kirby, and you will see her."

Edith followed him to the bow, and he pointed up-stream. Yes, there was the boat in which Mr. Henderson had gone up, a tiny speck on the bright water; and, beyond, the dark-brown sail of the junk running down with wind and current to help her. He was tempted to say something of his hope for the future, but he mastered the inclination; and, to keep her with him and have the pleasure of speaking to her, he offered to show her round the ship.

They passed along the upper deck under the cool awning. He pointed out MacMurdo's arrangements "for making all safe," as he put it. Down some iron steps they went to the main deck, where there was a glimpse of the engine-room, and they could see the crowd of coolies still rushing the fire-wood on board. There was an unexpected pleasing odor in the air, mingling with the smell of heated oil from the engine-room.

"What a strange smell!" said Edith. "Why, it's like the incense sticks they burn in the Chinese pagoda!"

## THE RED CIRCLE

“It’s the same thing,” replied Marker. “I am afraid your brother-in-law will be shocked. But the boys know we are starting on a voyage that may have some awkward incidents, and they are burning joss-sticks—‘punks,’ they call them. It’s their pagan way of saying their prayers. We could hardly stop them if we wanted to. They’re a lot of poor benighted heathen, as Mac says. If we went into their quarters for’ard, the first thing you would see would be an ugly picture of some joss or other, whose name I forget, stuck up inside the door.”

“It is horrid to be in the middle of all this Chinese worship,” said Edith. “But I suppose you are right, and it is not possible to stop it.”

“There’s no man on the river could do it,” observed Marker. “One sees the same thing on the big liners that have Chinese crews. I remember when I was first officer on one of them years ago, whenever it came on to blow hard one was almost stifled with the joss-sticks. I don’t, however, let them play their foolery outside their own quarters.”

They turned back to the main cabin amidships, and he pointed out the room he had given her—a small cabin usually assigned to two passengers, but MacMurdo had had the upper berth removed to give more space.

“Your sister has the next cabin,” he said; “and I have given up my own, the biggest of our little lot, for the children and their nurse. Mac gives his to Lebrun.”

## ON BOARD THE *TAI-SHAN*

“But where will you sleep?”

“Neither I nor Mac will get very much sleep between this and I-chang,” was the answer. “We shall have ‘forty winks’ now and then on a chair under the awning. Sailors can do without sleep at a pinch. In my sailing days my first captain told me no commander of a ship should sleep a wink from the time he got into the Channel till he was safe in the Thames or the Mersey.”

They went on deck again. The boat that had gone up the river had come alongside; the brown sail of the junk towered high over the water close at hand, and they could see De Visser embarking at the wharf to come on board.

Henderson stood in the bow of the junk, waving his hand to them. In a few minutes more the clumsy-looking craft dropped her sail, that came rattling down the mast as she drifted alongside the steamer and made fast to her.

De Visser had already got on board, bringing his own and Lebrun’s luggage, and a long bundle of rugs, rolled round and hiding two double-barreled fowling-pieces that the Belgians had brought to China in the hope of sport. “I have a bag of cartridges,” he explained. “They may come in handy in a fight at close quarters.” He made his way at once to Lebrun’s side.

Marker and MacMurdo helped the Hendersons on board. Ida and Herbert were delighted at being on the deck of the steamer. Their childish glee was in strange contrast to the serious faces of the elder folk. Mrs. Henderson looked pale

## THE RED CIRCLE

and tired, and went at once with her sister to her cabin.

Henderson was busy with Marker and the rough-looking fisherman who owned the junk. The clergyman was acting as interpreter in settling a bargain with the Chinaman. Marker wanted him to take two barge-loads of wood down the river as a reserve for the *Tai-shan*.

“Tell him,” he said to Henderson, “that the wind is getting stronger and is fair down-stream. He will tow them down easily enough. He need go only about twenty miles to the head of the narrows at the Tsung-ling Gorge. I will pick him up there, or before he gets so far, and pay him well.”

During the discussion Marker had called MacMurdo and given him an order. Forward the steam-winches began to clank, winding in the chain of the starboard anchor.

“Are you starting?” asked the clergyman.

“No,” said Marker; “but I shall hang on by one anchor, ready to get away smartly when the time comes. I shall hold on here till sunset, if I can. I am sending a note ashore to Shanghai Jack to pass on to the French Padre, telling him I am waiting as long as possible, in the hope that he will come on board, after all. I shall run down to the Tsung-ling Gorge in the evening. It is open water, and safe going so far, even if it is dark. If it’s a bright night we may even venture farther, if there’s any reason for haste; but twenty miles steaming down-river will shake

## ON BOARD THE *TAI-SHAN*

off the best junks up here, even if they are after us."

The fisherman accepted the offer made to him, and was soon working down the Yang-tse with the barges in tow. The starboard anchor, dripping with yellow mud, was hanging at the bow. Marker passed the order to take no more wood on board, and to clear away the barge that lay alongside. A few minutes later a boat went to the bund with his letters—one for Père Gratien, the other for the tao-tai: this last a brief undiplomatic note. The other boat was hoisted in. The *Tai-shan* lay isolated in the midst of the broad river, and MacMurdo was busy fitting his new fender over the bows—the last touch of preparation. The steward was getting tea ready in the main cabin. It would be a sort of house-warming, —a friendly meal at which the passengers of the *Tai-shan* would meet.

The boat came back with a report that the tao-tai had sent a guard to the English mission. Henderson, on hearing this, expressed the hope that all might yet be well.

"Have we cleared out too soon?" he asked.

"I don't think so," said Marker. "We are doing the right thing in taking no chances. There is no news of the French house. That's the storm center."

The tea-party in the salon was not very lively. There was an attempt to keep the conversation away from what every one was thinking of, and the result was a general air of constraint. Mac-

## THE RED CIRCLE

Murdo, pleading that he was busy, looked in for only a couple of minutes, and went on back again. Marker did most of the talking. He told irrelevant stories of early sea-going experiences; remembered he had once been at Antwerp, and asked De Visser questions about the new extensions of the port; in fact, tried to keep the thoughts of his guests as far as possible from Cheng-foo.

They were still at table when MacMurdo put his head in and asked the Captain to come on deck. Marker rose and went out.

"I hope there's nothing wrong," said Henderson. Then, after a minute or two of restlessness, he also left the table and went on deck.

The party in the cabin heard men tramping overhead, the clank of a winch, a sharp, hissing rush of steam. Mrs. Henderson looked alarmed, and said:

"Something is wrong. What can it be?"

"I imagine," replied De Visser, "that we are going to start. There is no need for alarm. The captain wants to get down-river a bit before it is dark. Steamers generally tie up at night on the river. He does not want to lie off the town in the darkness. Do not agitate yourself, madame. Stay here. I will go up, and come back and tell you."

When Henderson reached the deck there was no need to ask what was the matter. MacMurdo had just left Marker's side and was making his way to the engine-room. Marker, with his heavy binoculars to his eyes, was looking at the town and sweeping the river. A crowd with red ban-

## ON BOARD THE *TAI-SHAN*

ners displayed was gathering on the wharf, and men were busy hauling up the sails of two large junks. Others were getting into boats.

Marker turned to the clergyman and pointed to the town.

"You see what it is," he said. "They have got a mob together, and are fools enough to think they can rush the *Tai-shan*. We knew they had a scheme for taking her when the cargo-boats came alongside to-day; but we upset that by sending them away, and keeping a sharp watch on the new lot that brought the wood."

Forward, the clanking winch was getting up the remaining anchor; aft, a mass of dark smoke pouring from the funnel, and a sharp jet of white vapor hissing from the steam-pipe, showed that full pressure was being got on the boilers. One of the Chinese hands was at the wheel behind the wooden breastwork. The *Tai-shan* would soon be moving.

Two large junks, helped round by men towing them from the smaller boats, swung out from the bund, and, working with the side wind, stood out into the river. They were steering for the *Tai-shan*, and their decks were crowded with men. Henderson took the glass and saw that they were armed men, carrying a strange variety of weapons: rifles of European pattern, quaint native matchlocks, lances, three-pronged spears, swords, axes, clubs—a perfect museum of Oriental arms.

Marker stepped to his post beside the wheel.

## THE RED CIRCLE

Close by, the Chinese boatswain stood ready to interpret and pass his orders. The bow of the ship was up-stream, the position in which she had swung to her anchors against the current. De Visser had come on deck and touched the clergyman on the shoulder.

"It's come at last," he said. "Had you not better go down and reassure the ladies, and take care of them and Lebrun, and be ready to look after any one who is hit? I will stay to help to organize the defence."

Marker had been calling out his orders, repeated in a shrill cry by the serang. The steam-winches had stopped suddenly; there was a clink, clink of a hammer on a shackle-bolt, and then a roar as the chain cable slipped out through the hawse-hole and splashed into the river. The anchor had been slipped and abandoned to save time, instead of bringing it slowly up. Marker had pushed round the handle of the engine-room indicator, a bell tinkled away aft, and the ship throbbed to the stroke of the engines, one on each side as they set the great stern wheel turning, and churning up the yellow water of the river into a patch of dirty white foam. To De Visser's surprise, instead of turning down-stream, the *Tai-shan* was moving up the river.

MacMurdo appeared on deck again, called to the serang, and went below with him after a nod to Marker.

"Come with me," he said to De Visser, as he passed him.

## ON BOARD THE *TAI-SHAN*

Henderson had already gone below.

"Where's the parson?" asked MacMurdo, as De Visser followed him to the lower deck.

"Gone to the cabin to look after the ladies and Lebrun and the children, and get ready for casualties," said De Visser.

"Right! That's one thing settled," came MacMurdo's reply.

A little knot of Chinese sailors gathered round him. A chest was opened, and he began handing out Remington rifles and bundles of brass-cased cartridges.

"Have you any better fighting gear, De Visser?" he asked, looking up from his work while the men were arming.

"I have my pistol and the shot-guns," said the Belgian. "I wish I had a good rifle, for I can shoot."

"We can all do that, man. But can you hit? Yes? Well, take this Martini. It's better than the old Remingtons. I had it for myself, but I shall be busy. Go up alongside the Captain. He has another like it in a case near the wheel; and there's a fair lot of cartridges in the polished teak box to the right of it. When Marker tells you to begin, just try to knock out the Johnnies at the big tillers of the junks and upset their steering. You'll be doing us a service."

De Visser took the rifle and hurried eagerly on deck, leaving MacMurdo to post his men. The Belgian had his revolver on his belt under his loose jacket. He was ready for action. As he

## THE RED CIRCLE

reached the deck, the *Tai-shan* was turning sharply just above the town. Below on the river could be seen the dark sails and red streaming pennants of the junks manned by the adherents of the Red Circle. A third had joined the two others, and they were tacking up-stream, but barely able to hold their own against the current.

Marker was standing erect by the wheel. The rifle leaning on the breastwork, and the open case of shining copper cartridges, showed he was ready to take a part in the fight when the time came. For the present he was intent on watching the hostile craft and directing the manœuvres of his own. MacMurdo came up and went forward, clapping the Belgian on the shoulder as he passed him, and saluting the Captain cheerily: "We'll have them nicely!" He stopped beside the brass gun on the foredeck. One of his men squatted beside it, carefully loading it.

Below in the cabin, Henderson had told his fellow-passengers that there might be, probably would be, an encounter with hostile junks as the *Tai-shan* ran past the town.

"There's no real danger," he said—"no more than the danger of being struck by lightning in a summer storm. In any case, we are in God's hands. Let us commend our safety to Him. And now, dear wife, keep the children quiet and as happy as you can. Edith, we had better bring Mr. Lebrun's couch in here. This cabin is the safest place. Mr. Lebrun, I leave you to take care of the ladies. I must go on deck again.

## ON BOARD THE *TAI-SHAN*

No, don't think of trying to come with me.  
You are more useful here."

There was a moment of silence. The engine-room bells were ringing sharply. The full speed of the engines set the whole structure of the little steamer atremble. One could feel as well as hear their hurried throbbing. Above on deck all was still; there were no footsteps overhead. But through the murmuring drone and dull throb of the engines and theplash of the stern wheel came a strange, far-off wailing cheer—the voices of their enemies on board the junks. The crisis was close at hand.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER

CAPTAIN MARKER had run his ship up-stream as soon as he slipped her anchor because he saw that if he turned to run down at once, at least one of the Red Circle flotilla would be in a position to close with and board the *Tai-shan* before her crew were armed and ready for the attack. He might, it is true, have rammed the nearest of the enemy; but this was a method of taking the offensive that he wanted to avoid if possible. He knew that, despite MacMurdo's fender to protect the *Tai-shan*, she might suffer serious injury in collision with the heavily built river junk; and even if he ran his enemy down, it was quite likely that before he could get clear of her a number of Chinamen would come scrambling over his bows like so many wildcats.

This steaming up above the town was a manœuver that at first puzzled the enemy. Then they concluded that the ship was running away in terror of encountering them; and they gave a wild, shrill cheer as they tacked to follow her up. They knew well that they could not hope to rival

## THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER

the speed of the *Tai-shan* as she worked up with her engines; for they had to fight the current by making short tacks as they beat up against the wind, helping themselves by running out a couple of long oars on each junk. But they hoped that in the difficult navigation of the reaches above the town, where the *Tai-shan* had never yet been, she would soon ground on a bar of sand or gravel, or on a rocky reef where the hills closed in. Then she would be at their mercy. In any case, when she tied up for the night they might hope to surprise her.

Their elation gave way to sudden disappointment as the steamer turned above the town, and came rushing down the river at such speed as they had never seen her attempt in any of her appearances at Cheng-foo. The dirty, yellowish white foam piled up around her bows into a frothing mass, that broke and swept back in long eddies by her sides; and the wash rolled like a double wave across the river astern of her. A cloud of white steam was blowing from her safety-valves, and shot high above the steam-pipe by her funnel.

The lookout-men, perched aloft where the bamboo yard crossed the mast of each junk, could see very little sign of life on the steamer's deck. The awning had been cleared away. Forward, two men crouched by a small brass gun. The heads of three more just showed over the rough breastwork by the steering-wheel. There was something uncanny in seeing this strange European

## THE RED CIRCLE

craft—the only steamer most of the enemy had ever set eyes on—moving down at this terrible speed, without the least sign of human effort or activity about her.

On the *Tai-shan*'s deck the Chinese lascars squatted, rifle in hand, hidden by the bulwarks. They had thrown off their heavy shoes and their jackets, and coiled up their pigtails round their heads, and waited ready for the fight to begin, without any token of either eagerness or alarm. One of them had dragged up the fire-hose, and, holding the long brass nozzle with both hands, sent a spattering stream of water over the sun-scorched deck. Marker had given the order to flood the decks; for the Chinese might try to set the ship on fire, by throwing lighted combustibles on board, if they came to close quarters.

The ship had hardly turned when De Visser, leaning on the breastwork by the wheel, heard a step near him, and, looking over his shoulder, saw Mr. Henderson coming up. He was carrying a japanned tin case marked with a red cross—his first-aid equipment. He placed it on the deck behind the barrier, and sat down beside it. He looked up at De Visser without saying anything, only giving him a friendly smile of encouragement. In the tension of the moment no one cared to speak.

Marker's voice was the first to be heard breaking the silence. Touching De Visser on the shoulder, and pointing to the junk nearest the middle of the river, he said:

## THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER

"I'm going to starboard my helm in half a minute from this, and run right down on that fellow, just miss him and pass close across his bow. This will give us a wide berth of the other over there. We are not going to fire a shot till they open on us. The moment they do, try to bring down that rascal aloft on the yard. If you miss him, he'll throw a couple of beastly 'stink-pots' on board, and half suffocate some of us with the smoke, or fling down crackers to set us on fire."

"All right, sir! I don't mean to miss," said De Visser, slipping in a cartridge, and looking hard at the head and shoulders that just showed over the yard of the junk, a blot against the hot blue sky beside the tapering mast. De Visser wondered at the calm way in which he prepared to kill a man. It was his first experience of that strain of battle which deadens all ordinary feelings.

"Hard a-starboard!" Marker gave the order, and in his impatience put his own hand on the wheel, though the steain steering-gear needed no extra strength to swing the *Tai-shan* sharply off her course.

MacMurdo, crouching by the gun, thought the Captain was going to ram the enemy in deadly earnest. With the slow match glowing beside him ready to his hand, he kept the brass muzzle of the little cannon bearing on the junk, moving it gradually round as the position of the ship altered. He had no eyes now for anything but

## THE RED CIRCLE

the shining tube of bright brass and the crowd on the deck of the hostile junk.

Suddenly the Chinese craft flickered with fire, and was wrapped in a broken cloud of powder-smoke jets. Then came the crackling report of firearms and the whistle of bullets overhead, or the sharp ringing bangs and dull thuds as they struck steel plates or buried themselves in timber. On one knee behind the breastwork, with his rifle resting on it and tilted high, De Visser brought his sights to bear on his man. The mark was better than he had expected, for the Chinaman had craned forward over the yard. He pressed the trigger and held his breath for a moment. No, he had not missed. The man had fallen over the sail, but held on with both hands to the yard, and hung for a second or two trying to save himself. Then he slid down the bulging upper part of the matting that formed the sail, grabbing helplessly at it, and dropped like a stone amid the crowd on deck.

De Visser felt a grim joy in his success as he slipped in another cartridge and glanced at the enemy's deck, now close at hand, to choose another living target. Along the bulwark, the Chinese crew of the *Tai-shan* were firing fast, and not without effect, as the confusion on the enemy's deck showed. Men were tugging wildly at the heavy braces of the junk's mainsail, evidently meaning to tack and avoid collision. He sent bullet after bullet among them, hoping to spoil their manoeuvre. Then there was a deafening

## THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER

crash, and a cloud of hot suffocating smoke rolled round him like a temporary fog.

He ceased firing, and sprang to his feet with an impression of disaster. But the smoke cleared in a moment, and the sight of MacMurdo and his Chinese comrade reloading the brass gun explained what had happened. Marker himself had taken the wheel, and was spinning it round, avoiding collision with the junk so narrowly that De Visser caught his breath, and thought that, as the *Tai-shan* swung to the helm, her stern wheel would crash into the enemy's rounded bows.

With senses sharpened by the tension of the moment, in this pause in his own activity he saw at a glance things he had not noticed till then. Bullets were coming from the other side, singing high in air—some with a sharp whistling sound, others with a dull booming drone; for the junk that had been coming up the north side of the river was firing at them—at long range, thanks to Marker's sudden change of course to midstream. Why was Marker himself steering? De Visser saw the ghastly explanation close by him; for on the deck behind the wheel lay the Chinese steersman, huddled up like a heap of rags, with a brown arm and clenched fist stretched out motionless. Nor was this the only casualty. A few feet forward of the breastwork, Henderson knelt under the shelter of the bulwarks, busy administering first aid to another of the lascars.

The *Tai-shan* was rushing past the junk that she had engaged at close quarters, so hotly and

## THE RED CIRCLE

with such fierce menace of attack with the ram, that the Chinese captain had thought more of saving his own vessel than of boarding his antagonist. The lascars, after pouring a sharp fusillade into her as they went by, were running aft to give her some parting shots. The serang was calling to them to answer the fire of the other ship, whose bullets were now beginning to patter about the deck.

De Visser, turning to look at this new antagonist, and noting at one glance that she was already hopelessly distanced, was startled to see also his friend Lebrun, pale, haggard, with a wild excitement in his eyes, come running along the deck from the cabin stairway, a fowling-piece in his hand.

"Where are they? Let me help!" he called out in French.

He put his hand on the breastwork to steady himself; for, once he stopped moving, he could hardly stand, and everything seemed to be swimming about him in a confused haze. Then, with a smothered cry, he fell in a heap on the wet deck.

"*Mon Dieu!* He is hit!" exclaimed De Visser, as he bent over him.

Some one else bent down at the same moment, unnoticed by him; for he was looking only at Lebrun's white face. Edith Kirby had come running from the stairway.

"He is not hit," she said, reassuringly. "He has only fainted. I was coming up to bring him

## THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER

back, and I saw him fall. How can we take him down?"

Marker started as he heard her voice, and turned, with one hand on the steering-wheel, which he could not let go.

"You here, Edith!" he exclaimed, forgetting conventional forms in his excitement. "Good heavens, you will be hit yourself! Hurry away below!"

She looked up smiling and answered:

"I must see to my patient. I will go below if we can move him there also."

Marker called a sailor to the wheel, and stood near her, sheltering her. MacMurdo came hurrying aft. His hands were black with oil and powder-grime, and as he passed one of them across his face it left a broad mark that would have set every one laughing at a less-serious moment. He took in the situation at a glance.

"Give me a hand, De Visser," he said, "and I'll carry him down with you. And you, Miss Kirby, slip below deck as quickly as you can."

As he bent to raise Lebrun he spoke to the Captain:

"There's not much discipline left. Our rascals are not up to the R. N.<sup>1</sup> mark, and are wasting good cartridges and listening to no one."

"I'll stop the firing presently," answered Marker; and he took Edith's arm. "Come down at once," he said. "It's dangerous up here."

<sup>1</sup> Royal Navy.

## THE RED CIRCLE

And a bullet, knocking two holes in a ventilating cowl with a sharp ringing crack, gave force to his warning.

“Don’t be afraid for me. I’ll go now,” said Edith, slipping her arm out of his, and running down the stairway after the two men who had disappeared with Lebrun. They laid him on a couch in the cabin and left him to her care. Mrs. Henderson, who had been crouching on the floor holding the hands of her children, came with a white face to her help.

MacMurdo caught at a water-bottle on the table, filled a glass and drank it.

“I never thought to enjoy mere cold water so much,” he said. “But even a little scrap of a fight like this makes one thirsty. Have a drink yourself, De Visser, and come on deck. Your chum is all right now.” He looked at his watch. “Why, the whole thing has lasted barely ten minutes!” he exclaimed. “It felt like an hour.”

De Visser drank, and followed him on deck, after seeing that his comrade was recovering from his collapse. He was surprised to find how different everything looked when once more he stood beside Marker. The dead man had been taken away, and one of the lascars with a bucket and mop was cleaning a blood-stain from the planking where he had fallen. The rest of the men had ceased firing, laid aside their arms, and set to work to wash down the decks forward. The engines had slowed down to normal speed. Looking back up the river, he saw the three junks

## THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER

sharply defined against the red western sky. One of them was still firing a few shots; but she was out of range, and the bullets ricochetted harmlessly on the surface of the river far astern, throwing up bright jets of water.

Beyond, the town of Cheng-foo was still in sight, the houses clustering darkly along the river-bank, the tiled roofs of the great pagoda flashing in the setting sun. On the hill, a clump of trees defined the position of the English mission station. That of the Catholic one De Visser could judge only by its direction from the pagoda. But, looking through the binoculars at the eastern end of the town, he was glad to see that no trail of rising smoke hung over it. The mission must still be safe; for if it had been stormed, the Red Circle men would certainly have set it on fire, even at the risk of burning down half of Cheng-foo.

Mr. Henderson, having attended to one seriously wounded man, and two others who were suffering from mere grazes and bruises, had gone down to the cabin. MacMurdo was in the engine-room. De Visser and the Captain were the only white men on deck.

Marker had taken off his heavy sun-helmet, and substituted a cap for it. He stood between the helm and the engine-room telegraph. In front of him, on a little shelf or folding-table, and protected by a glass screen, was a chart of the Upper Yang-tse. It was a British admiralty chart; but this portion of it was little more than an outline of the river's course, and it was freely

## THE RED CIRCLE

marked with manuscript notes of his own; for in every voyage he had learned more about the river. He could now be his own pilot; and, with a leadsmen at the bow to check the depth of water, he thought he might even venture to hold on long after dark. Much as he would have wished to join the party in the cabin even for a short time, he had made up his mind not to leave the deck till the *Tai-shan* was far on her way downstream.

As De Visser came up to him he raised his eyes from the chart and gave the Belgian a warm grasp of his hand.

"You are a right good man to have with one in a tight corner," he said. "You did splendidly."

"I did very little—just let off a few shots," the other replied, deprecatingly.

"A few shots!" exclaimed the Captain. "Why, short as our naval battle was, there are at least two dozen empty copper cartridge-cases in my magazine here! You blazed them all away, and, judging by the first, you shot straight. You must have closed the account of a good score of those river pirates. Don't look surprised or shocked, man!"

"But I had no idea I fired so much, and I don't feel quite happy about killing men."

"Never you mind that! If those cutthroats had once got aboard of us, it would have ended horribly for us all. What kept them off was your rifle, Mac's whiff of scrap metal, and my threat to run them down. The boys with the old

## THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER

Remingtons shot wild. They couldn't miss doing some damage; but they wasted a lot of good cartridges, and we have not too many left."

"I hope we shall not want them again, Captain."

"Perhaps not. A stern chase is a long chase. Those fellows are not likely to catch us up, unless we have the bad luck to pile up the ship on a reef in the Tsung-ling narrows. But there's always the risk of some of the towns lower down being in a state of excitement."

In front, the hills, closing in so that it looked as if the broad river were a lake, showed that the narrows of the Tsung-ling pass were not many miles away. The pursuing junks were out of sight. Perhaps they had given up the chase. For, with the current to help her, the *Tai-shan* was doing a steady twelve knots an hour. She was rapidly overtaking a native sailing-boat that was drifting down the river, helped by the wind, with a couple of mastless barges in tow.

"I suppose we shall slow down presently to pick those barges up?" De Visser said, inquiringly.

"Yes. I'll give them a line, and help them till after dark. That won't be long. Then we shall anchor for a bit, clear the wood out of one of the barges, send her back empty with the fisher-boat, and take the other in tow. We can have dinner while we are anchored. Funerals are depressing, and some of the boys will be taking the quartermaster's coffin ashore to bury him while you are all below at dinner."

"The man who was killed at the wheel?"

## THE RED CIRCLE

"Yes. He was a good sailor and a trusty fellow all round. He had his brains knocked out by a big slug that I dare say was meant for me."

"So you are going to bury him up here to-night. It's quick work to have a coffin made."

"We have not made it: it was ready."

The Belgian stared at him, and Marker went on:

"You're new to China, or you would know that John Chinaman takes no risks about his funeral. Some of us white men make a lot of fuss about where and how we would like to be buried, though it's best to leave all that trouble to one's friends and relations. When a Chinaman begins to fidget that way he buys a nice painted and lacquered coffin, all color and varnish, and keeps it by him, and takes a look at it to cheer himself up when he feels dull. No, I'm not joking. We have five or six coffins wrapped up in oilcloth and stowed away in the forepeak now. The boys invest their savings first in a swagger silk robe and cap, all embroidery, to go ashore in when they have a holiday at Hankow. Then they save up and buy a coffin, so they can make a good show whether they are alive or dead."

A few minutes later Marker was too busy for conversation. The *Tai-shan* slowed down, and De Visser watched him taking in tow the string of native craft. As the voyage was resumed the sun had set, and the short evening was deepening fast into night. Spurs of the hills running down to the river loomed up in the twilight into huge

## THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER

overshadowing masses. In the valleys that ran up into the high ground between them, here and there a lonely light shining dimly through the gathering darkness showed where a farmer had made his home; but this part of the river-banks was very scantily inhabited.

Presently the anchor was let go, and the throb of the engines and theplash of the stern-wheel paddles ceased. But, then, there was noise of another kind—the shouts of men hauling a barge alongside, and the rattle and tramp of those who set to work to get in the fire-wood. The dynamo had been started at sunset, and the electric light threw a white gleam over the decks, the barges, the hustling crowd of workers, the rushing river. Forward, there was a red glow of torches as four of the dead steersman's friends pushed off in the boat that carried his coffin ashore. De Visser would have lingered to watch the strange scene, but the steward came to tell him that dinner had begun and the rest were anxious at his non-appearance.

As he left the deck for the cabin he thought of all the changing events of the day, and, with a sudden sinking of the heart, wondered how it fared at the mission station of Cheng-foo.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE NEW CHRISTIANS

PÈRE GRATIEN bade good - by to De Visser and Lebrun, and turned back to his house. He experienced at first a deep sense of loneliness, but it quickly gave way to a feeling akin to relief. For hours there had been a half-consciousness of strain and conflict in his thoughts. His resolution to stay at his post had been taken, and his will clung firmly to it; but all the time there was, as it were, another will, another mind, suggesting that it was a quixotic folly—that it would be wiser to go, and return again, to rebuild the ruined mission, saving his life and energy for years of useful work, instead of throwing away in a moment the experience of a long past, the preparation for a future of effective effort.

But with the departure of the two Europeans a decisive step had been taken. The sense of inward conflict disappeared, and for a while he thought only of all that was to be done before nightfall. He went to the desk in his study. The portrait group on the wall caught his eye, but he turned for a moment to the great crucifix

## THE NEW CHRISTIANS

that hung near it, and then sat down to write. His pen ran rapidly over the paper. He was sending what was probably his last report to the Vicar Apostolic. When he had finished he wrote a few lines to his home, and enclosed it, to be forwarded only when there was certain news of his death. It was a letter such as a soldier writes and leaves with a comrade before battle—a few sentences into which the writer tries to condense assurances of affection to the last for the dear ones at home, and some word of consolation to sustain them in their trial. Then he took from a portfolio some of the papers of the mission that his successor might need, and sealed them in a packet with the letters.

By the time that all was ready, Paul, the catechist, had returned with the news that Lebrun was safe at the riverside wharf, and that the other Europeans were gathered there. Père Gratien gave him the letters to convey to De Visser, with a verbal message. He called his servants and told them to keep the gates closed, and open them only to his own people or to duly accredited messengers. He then spoke to them of the dangers of the day, and of the night that would follow; telling them to pray to God for protection and for courage to meet whatever might be His will. If any feared, he said, they had better leave the mission station now, and go away from the town and hide for a while in one of the villages he sometimes visited. "But," he added, "think before you go; for there may be equal danger every-

## THE RED CIRCLE

where." The men replied that they would stay. There was no outburst of feeling, and apparently no enthusiasm. They were not demonstrative people, but he felt he could rely on them all the more for that.

Among the thousands crowded into the lanes and alleys of Cheng-foo he had for his flock only about two hundred baptized Christians, half of them children and young people. Then there were some forty more catechumens, all adults or young folk of an age to think for themselves—converts under instruction and on probation, but not yet admitted to baptism. He had sent word to these to come to him in the church early in the afternoon, and his messengers were also to warn the Christians generally that an outbreak against them was more than likely as the day went on. Some of them had already heard rumors of this.

But, apart from these warnings, there were signs of the coming storm. In some mysterious way even those who had no connection with the secret society became aware that something out of the common was going to happen. Men left off their work; shops began to close; groups of idlers gathered at street corners, and wild reports of strange events elsewhere passed from mouth to mouth.

For most of the Catholics of Cheng-foo the first idea, as soon as they realized that they were in danger, was to take refuge at the mission station, where day after day so many of them gathered for the early Mass and the evening prayer. For

## THE NEW CHRISTIANS

the more zealous and devout among them, there was the thought that, if they were to die, they had better be beside their pastor and under the shadow of the altar. For others, there was the lower feeling that made them go with the rest, as a herd of frightened animals huddles together when alarmed. A few were even so timid that they hid in their houses, and hoped that their connection with the mission station was unknown to its enemies. Of the catechumens, few were missing at the rendezvous. They were in the first fervor of their conversion, and had legitimate hopes that one result of the crisis would be to hasten their admission to the full privileges of the religion they had long since declared themselves eager to embrace.

For Père Gratien, the crowd that had gathered in his church was a new subject of anxiety. He wavered between two different courses of action. Assembled together there, they might easily be massacred in a crowd; but would they be much safer dispersed in their homes? With himself in their midst he might give them help and encouragement, but, on the other hand, he could rely on the stanchness of most of them. If they dispersed, the fury of the mob might exhaust itself in the destruction of the mission station; and the sacrifice of his own life might satisfy their longing for blood, and so save the lives of some at least of his people. Then came the question whether, if the Christians dispersed in the town, he ought not to hide among them. These problems were

## THE RED CIRCLE

recurring to his mind from time to time as he devoted himself to his first task—the reception of the new converts. There would be ample time for the ceremony; for nothing was likely to happen till after the funeral of Li-tsu.

The ritual for the baptism of adults is one of the most beautiful of the services of the Church. Many of the Christians of Cheng-foo were there to witness it; and Père Gratien, standing before the altar, wearing his surplice and stole, turned to his flock and reminded them of the day of their own baptism, of the promises they had then made, and called on them to renew these pledges, and pray for grace to be true to them to the last. Outside in the courtyard, sheltered by a veranda from the hot blaze of the afternoon sun, the converts waited, under the charge of Paul, the catechist, who was giving them a last instruction on the sacred rite of baptism.

Kneeling before the altar, the priest recited the psalm with which the service begins. There was the opening psalm of praise: “O Lord, our Lord, how wonderful is Thy name in all the earth!” There was a new sense of God’s protecting power in the commemoration of His dominion over all His creatures. Then came another psalm enforcing the same lesson, ending with the promise: “The Lord will strengthen His people, the Lord will bless His people with peace.” There was danger all around. Would the promised peace be that of the world to come?

The third psalm spoke of the longing to be with

## THE NEW CHRISTIANS

God: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God! My soul hath thirsted for the strong living God. When shall I come and appear before the face of God?" And its last verses seemed written for that moment: "My enemies who troubled me have reproached me, whilst they say to me day by day, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why dost thou disquiet me? Hope thou in God; for I will still give praise to Him, the salvation of my countenance and my God."

As Père Gratien rose from the altar and turned to go to meet the new converts at the church door his people saw in his face a look of exultation—a look of joyful courage that gave confidence to them all. Under the long veranda at the door he put the ritual questions to the catechumens, and, prompted by the catechist, they replied. There was the request for admission to the Church of God, with its promise of life everlasting; the renunciation of the demon and his works and pomps; the profession of faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the exhortation to keep the two great commandments of love to God and man; the summons to Satan to depart and "give place to the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete"; the signing of foreheads and breasts with the cross; and the warning to the converts that, thus signed on head and heart, they were to be themselves the temples of God, and gladly profess that they had "escaped the snares of death, renounced false

## THE RED CIRCLE

gods, and rejected idols, to worship God the Father Almighty, and Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who shall come to judge the living and the dead."

There seemed a special meaning in the exhortation to take up the Cross of Christ and in the repeated exorcisms. For some of those poor people had known what demon-worship meant; and in declaring that they renounced Satan and became followers of Christ, his conqueror, they knew that in a few hours they might be called upon to follow their new Master to Calvary.

And now they were told to enter into the church; and, following the priest, they gathered round the font, placed at the side of the altar in full view of the congregation. The renunciations, the exorcisms were repeated, and at last there was the final request for baptism, and the pouring of the sacramental water on the head of each in turn. Then, with the lighted candles in their hands, they took their places before the sanctuary, and, in presence of the Blessed Sacrament enthroned on the altar, the newly baptized and their elder brethren in the Faith joined in praise and thanksgiving.

The rite was over, and the priest turned to address his people. There was not time to say much. After a few words as to what they had just witnessed, and a final exhortation to suffer anything rather than be false to the vows of their baptism, he told them he had decided that it was best for them to disperse to their homes—going

## THE NEW CHRISTIANS

out a few at a time, so as to avoid attracting too much attention. He would wait there to hear the confessions of any who had not come to him in the morning. A temporary chapel would be constructed in the house of one of them. Where it would be, they would be told later. It was Friday. Two days hence, on Sunday (if he still lived), there would be Mass somewhere in secret for as many of them as could safely assemble to hear it. But he doubted if he would see many of them again, for, at any risk, he would have to be among those who would be first in danger if a rising took place. There were tears in the eyes of many as he went on to wish them farewell and to promise that if he were taken from them "another and a better pastor" would be sent to them.

He was moving toward the confessional when the momentary stillness was broken by a loud noise outside—the growing tumult of a moving crowd and the crackling reports of exploding gunpowder. Some of the people started up in sudden alarm. The priest raised his hand to bid them keep still and said:

"There is no fear, my children. It is the funeral of Li-tsu that is passing by. They will go on, and there will be no danger till they return. He died a good death. He is one of us, though his body is being taken by force to the grave by the pagans. Let us kneel and say the *De Profundis* for his soul."

As the psalm was said, the funeral passed by outside. The group of Christians who held the

## THE RED CIRCLE

barred gate heard the angry howl of the crowd at the sight of the cross above the mission station. The reports of the crackers, fired off to drive away the demons from the dead, became so numerous that they sounded like a rapid fusillade. Outside, the crowd poured past the chapel, kept from any sudden outburst of violence by the mandarin's guard, which halted in double rank at the mission gate, and moved on only when the last of the long, irregular procession had passed, escorting the painted coffin of Li-tsu, around which waved the red banners of the Circle.

As soon as the street was clear of this dangerous mob the first party of Christians passed out. Père Gratien was hearing confessions in the church. Paul, the catechist, with a trusted helper, was removing the few things of value that were in the sacristy and burying them in a hiding-place he had already carefully contrived under the pavement of a garden walk. In the priest's study the wallet he carried with him when he made his expeditions to visit the few Christians in the outlying villages was packed with all that was necessary for saying Mass—the portable altar-stone, the miniature chalice, the vestments of the thinnest silk, the small altar-cloths, and Missal. This was to be taken to a house in one of the poorest lanes of the town, which had been chosen as the temporary mission station. At the last moment Père Gratien himself would convey there the Treasure of the Tabernacle, the few Hosts he had reserved, and which he would consume if

## THE NEW CHRISTIANS

danger became imminent. It would be his Viaticum.

A trusty scout had been sent to watch the movements of the crowd which had followed Li-tsu's funeral, and he sent back word that there was an unexpected respite. From the grave the mob had marched off—some toward the English mission station where Li-tsu had died, or, as the Red Circle chiefs put it, where he had been murdered by the "foreign devils"; others were making their way to the riverside, on the report that all the foreigners were escaping in the steamer. They were to be stopped by the river people, whose business had a formidable competitor in the *Tai-shan* and her captain. There might be no attack on the mission till after dark.

The crowd round the confessional gradually diminished. The people went away in small parties. At last the priest was alone with Paul and a few more whom he had told to stay with him. He came out to remove the Blessed Sacrament from the Tabernacle, and to withdraw to the workman's house which had been chosen as his refuge. He stood for a moment, taking a last look at his church, which he now felt was doomed to all but certain destruction.

And then there came from the direction of the river the loud reports of heavy firing, and he knelt to pray for the safety of those who had been his friends—brave De Visser, poor doubting Lebrun, the English missionary and his household,

## THE RED CIRCLE

the two sailors of the *Tai-shan* who had been so devotedly ready to help them all.

As he still knelt there was a loud explosion, and then the firing died away in dropping isolated shots; and in a few minutes all was still again. The fight was over, and he wondered what had been its result.

## CHAPTER XV

### A POLITIC RULER

LEFT in temporary command of the English mission station and hospital, Mr. Sung had not taken long to make up his mind as to what was the best course of conduct for him to adopt. One thing was quite clear to him—he took it as a self-evident axiom, from which his reasoning started: he did not mean to be hacked to pieces by the mad fanatics of the Red Circle. He was no coward, but at the same time he was no fool.

It is a rare thing for a Chinaman to have any faint-hearted fears for his life. There are false ideas on the subject among Americans and Europeans, who have read of Chinamen being routed by comparatively small bodies of armed white men or of disciplined Japanese. The fact is, Chinamen, being of a logical turn of mind and having no special pride in military exploits, will abandon the field when they realize that they are hopelessly outnumbered, or that primitive weapons are useless against the better armament of their opponents. But even then there is seldom a panic flight. In the Boxer revolt they showed reckless

## THE RED CIRCLE

courage. Even the civilian population has often displayed a strange disregard of danger. At a much earlier period than that of the Boxer uprising, when the British bombarded Canton, crowds gathered along the wharves to watch the attack, and stood there with the shells screaming over their heads, and boatmen rowed out through the fire to sell fruit to the bluejackets of the hostile warships.

Mr. Sung, therefore, was not much afraid of being killed, but he saw no reason why he should not live. At the same time he thought out a plan for preserving Mr. Henderson's property from destruction, and reaping much credit when (as he was sure would happen) the authorities, backed by the white men, got the upper hand and order was restored in Cheng-foo.

No sooner had his master departed than he called the servants together and told them that, out of the funds left at his disposal, he would presently pay them their wages and a gratuity, and give them leave of absence for a week, warning them that they must keep the peace and remain quiet in the homes of their relatives or friends, and, above all, avoid any contact with the Red Circle mob. There were two tall flagstaffs at the gate of the compound. On one of these he hoisted a yellow flag with a wonderful dragon on it, with red mouth and claws and a twisted tail. Mr. Henderson had never flown the Chinese flag: the Union Jack was good enough for him, and on festive occasions his flag-poles flew it, with the

## A POLITIC RULER

Red Cross flag of St. George as its companion. But Sung had long had the dragon flag in his possession as a possible help in an emergency.

This done, he exchanged his semi-European dress, which Mr. Henderson made him wear as a prospective candidate for the ministry, for a flowing robe of blue silk and a round cap with a coral button. He had no right to the rank the button indicated, but he did not mind that. Who was going to challenge it? Mr. Sung meant to play a game of bluff, and take minor risks in doing so. He had sent for a wheeled chair, and when it arrived he told the coolie who drew it to take him to the yamen, and ordered two of the servants to escort him to that functionary's dwelling.

Arrived at the yamen, he demanded instant audience with the tao-tai. The doorkeeper raised objections, but Sung had a ready argument—a few silver dollars dexterously insinuated into the official's hand. Five minutes later he was in the mandarin's presence, fully alive to the importance of favorably impressing that powerful if somewhat undecided official.

Notwithstanding all the magistrate's affectation of reposeful dignity, Sung was keen-sighted enough to see that he was in a very uneasy state of mind. But he took care to be most correct and deferential to him. In long, flowery phrases he informed him that all the Europeans had gone, and that he, Sung, was now the chief of the English hospital, and responsible for all the property left there.

“I commend it to your Excellency's exalted

## THE RED CIRCLE

wisdom," he said. "I might have claimed that, as I am in the employment of Henderson, who is a British subject, and as being left in charge of British property, I had a right to call upon your Excellency to supply an armed guard, and that in case of the place's being destroyed by a mob you would be responsible, and the foreigners would demand reparation and the degradation of the local officials, or worse. But I do not want to talk of foreign protection. I have not hung up a foreign flag. Our own flag flies over the hospital, which in any case is a useful institution for the town. I shall bring what is necessary to a house near here; and if, unhappily, any of your people are hurt in these troubles I will save their lives for you. Mr. Henderson and the others are gone. I shall send away his servants and lock the doors, and leave it all to the protection of your Excellency's wisdom. It is now a Chinese house under the dragon flag. There are no foreigners there; and, with a guard placed to protect it, certainly the misguided people will not do any harm there."

The tao-tai looked at Sung out of his sloping eyes and tapped with his fingers on the lacquered table beside him.

"These are difficult times," he said, after a pause, almost as if he were talking to himself.

"They are difficult," echoed Sung—"yes, very difficult. But the unbounded wisdom and intelligence of your Excellency will guide and protect us."

## A POLITIC RULER

"You are a loyal man," said the tao-tai, insinuatingly; "though you have been taught the learning of the foreigners. You will help me."

"So far as my foolish weakness will permit," replied Sung, with polite self-depreciation.

"I have few soldiers," the tao-tai went on—"very few: hardly enough to guard the treasury of the yamen. I have sent all I could spare to escort the funeral of this man Li-tsu. When that is done, if I send them to guard the English hospital, as property of the Government, will you swear, if there should be a State inquiry, that I have done all I could to protect property?"

"I will swear you have saved the English house," said Sung. "But why does your Excellency call it Government property?"

"All things belong to the Son of Heaven, the Emperor," observed the tao-tai. "It may be that after these troubles there will be a decree that it is a Government institution. Dr. Henderson and his people are gone. Who knows if they will ever return? I shall tell my officer to take possession of the place, and to seal up all papers. It will be better for you and for me. The board of inquiry can then find no fault, whatever the Government wishes."

"As your Excellency pleases," said Sung, with a bow.

The tao-tai went on, pleased to have a witness to testify later to his good intentions, if need be:

"I would send a guard to the French teacher of religion, but I have now no soldiers to spare; and

## THE RED CIRCLE

the hospital is more important for the town and the people. I have told you I would save the Frenchman if I could. You will remember?"

"I shall not forget your Excellency's comfortable words of wisdom."

"I wish that he had gone with the others," said the tao-tai. "They will all go on the English fire-boat. Is it not so?"

"Yes," replied Sung, with another bow. "Your Excellency wishes it. They have anticipated your wise wishes on their behalf."

"It is well," said the tao-tai, thoughtfully. "It may be that the Government wishes them to go away. Some say that all the foreigners will be expelled. But if they come back again you will not forget that I have been their friend, that I am protecting the hospital; and I would guard the French house also, but I have not the men."

Sung gave a deep bow.

"With your Excellency's permission, I shall go. I shall testify when the time comes that your Excellency has protected us. I feel safe under your shadow. I go to hand over the hospital and the house to your Excellency's servants."

As he passed out through the courtyard Sung felt happy. He had secured as far as possible the safety of Mr. Henderson's property, and might now watch events with a mind comparatively at peace.

The tao-tai called his secretary and gave his orders. First, a message was to be sent to the officer commanding the escort of the procession.

## A POLITIC RULER

As soon as the funeral was out of the town he was to march his party to the English mission station and take possession of it. If the Red Circle chiefs threatened to attack it they were to be told that all the foreigners had been sent away, and it was now State property. A clerk of the yamen was to go at once to see Mr. Sung there, and seal up all papers. The yamen guard was to be on the alert to prevent any gathering in the immediate neighborhood of the tao-tai's own residence. As to the requests for a guard for the French property, there were no men to spare. The Red Circle leaders might be informed that, though no guard had been placed over it, it was his Excellency's wish that they should respect it.

The tao-tai caught a smile on his secretary's face as he looked up.

"You have means of informing them and warning them," said the magistrate, gravely.

"They shall be warned," rejoined the secretary. "But they are lawless men: they may disregard the warning."

"They will answer for it later," said the mandarin. "But it may keep them busy and avert worse dangers. If the French teacher had been wise and gone with the rest we could have protected his property. If he rashly remains, are we to blame for his folly?"

"The foreigners," remarked the secretary, "with all their boast of learning, are fools at heart. Your Excellency's orders shall be executed." As he went away he said to himself:

## THE RED CIRCLE

“A wise man will throw a bone to an angry dog. The French teacher is the bone.” And he felt pleased that his official career had begun under so politic and resourceful a master.

Thus it was that, when the coffin of Li-tsü was being laid in a shallow grave by the roadside on the ridge above Cheng-foo, the armed escort slipped from the crowd and made its way to the English mission station by the clump of trees on the hilltop. They found an official of the yamen in possession, and stationed themselves by the gateway, where the yellow flag with the long-tailed dragon flapped from the tall red pole. If the mob came they would not have to fight them, only to support the dignity of the official, who would tell the leaders that the foreigners had been driven away and their property seized, and that there was no reason for wasting their energies on the place, which now belonged to the province of Sze-chuan, and had no connection with the foreign devils.

When the grave was closed a cry had been raised to march upon the house where Li-tsü had met his death. But there were divided counsels. One of the chiefs protested that he had information that the tao-tai had driven the foreigners away from it and confiscated everything there for the benefit of the town. While the point was being argued a messenger arrived in hot haste with news that the foreigners were embarking on the *Tai-shan*, and that an experienced river pirate (now temporarily engaged in trade) had offered to lead

## A POLITIC RULER

an attack upon her if he were supported by some of the fighting-men of the Red Circle. He promised an easy victory. The crowd broke up. All the more ardent spirits, all the most enterprising leaders, moved off for the wharves, to take part in or to witness the capture of the *Tai-shan*. It was only a small party that went toward the English hospital. When they reached it the sight of the armed guard and the arguments of the yamen official turned them from their purpose, and the outbreak of firing on the river made these also hasten to the wharves to see the naval engagement and exult in the coming destruction of the foreigners.

It was a disappointing experience for them all. The crowd on the wharves had felt a wild delight as they saw the steamer apparently taking to flight up the river. Old sailors of the Yang-tse called out that she would run aground and be a helpless wreck, at the mercy of the attack. But then they saw her suddenly turn, rush down on the hostile flotilla, burst into a sputter of fierce firing, close with the largest of her enemies, send forth a great cloud of smoke with a red tongue of flame in the heart of it, and, as the roar of the explosion echoed along the river, dash away from the three junks and rush down-stream at a speed that seemed to defy pursuit.

One of the junks drifted toward the wharf, with her deck heaped with maimed and dead men. The others seemed to be following the victor in a half-hearted fashion. The old pirate's boast

## THE RED CIRCLE

had proved a delusion. He had tried to keep his word; and he lay dead on the deck of his ship, so he could not be asked to explain his failure.

The crowd stood watching the *Tai-shan* growing smaller and smaller in the distance as she sped down the broad river, now reddening with the sunset glow. The dare-devil cleverness of those foreigners was exasperating. The defeated junk had hauled in to the wharf, and there was a curious interest in seeing the dead and wounded being brought ashore. Then the word was passed that the French teacher had not gone with the rest. There was still a prospect of vengeance. The red banners of the Circle were shaken out, gongs and drums began to beat, and the crowd streamed away into the town.

At the end of the street that branched off to the yamen and the main thoroughfare, with its rows of shops, a bristling double row of pikes barred the way, and an officer warned the leaders that they must not approach the tao-tai's residence. They had no wish to do so. They led their followers through a tangle of darkening lanes; and, as the night closed in, a yelling mob surrounded the French mission station.

It was the hour when, evening after evening, the Christians gathered there for prayer. But the leaders had had the place watched, and they knew there was no congregation there to-night. Even without this information, the crowd knew it, for many of them had sometimes lingered in the evening near the outer wall to listen to the

## A POLITIC RULER

music within—the long, deep notes of the American organ, the singing of the hymns muffled by the walls. Now all was silent and dark.

There was a knocking at the outer gate, but there came no answer to it. The crowd ceased to yell, and the leaders gathered together to consult as to what was next to be done. Perhaps, after all, the priest and the catechist and others were hiding within; or perhaps they had prepared some trap. It was disappointing that there was no answer to their challenge at the gate. What was to be done?

## CHAPTER XVI

### DOWN THE YANG-TSE

THROUGH the hot summer night the *Tai-shan* remained anchored in the shadow of the hills at the entrance to the Tsung-ling narrows. Marker and MacMurdo never left the deck. They took turns to watch while one of them dozed for a while in a cane chair placed near the wheel. For there was just a chance that the hostile junks might continue their pursuit and come drifting down the stream in the darkness.

It was a moonlit night. As the moon rose over the hills that seemed to close in the gorge to the eastward its rays silvered a broad reach of the river for nearly a mile toward Cheng-foo. The steamer had swung to her anchor with her bow up-stream, and thus the lookout forward and the watcher by the wheel had this clear view for a mile in the direction of possible danger. The fires were kept bright in the stoke-hold, to which MacMurdo paid occasional visits of inspection. The pressure gauges of the boilers showed a good head of steam that could be rapidly increased in a few minutes. More than once the safety-valves

## DOWN THE YANG-TSE

blew off with a sharp hiss. There was power enough to start at a moment's notice. But it was a risk to be taken only if there was pressing danger; for from the bend of the river, half a mile below, came the dreamy, droning sound of the rushing rapids of Tsung-ling, and to pass them by moonlight would be a difficult operation.

After midnight the position became more anxious, for as the moon rose higher the hills threw broad shadows across the river, and under the steep south bank there was black darkness, through which enemies might steal down, hidden still more by the hot mist that began to gather on the water. Marker sent two trusty men in a boat up-stream with signal rockets. They were to lie tied up to the river-bank three-quarters of a mile away, and act as an outpost to the steamer till dawn.

In their cabins the refugee passengers had a restless night, with little sleep. Henderson had given Lebrun and the wounded men opiates to secure them undisturbed rest. More than once in the night he visited them, and passed a few minutes with Marker and MacMurdo on deck. It was a relief to all when the white light of dawn came up the eastern sky, and the shrill whistle of the *Tai-shan* called in the boat from up-river and roused the crew to another day's work. As the sun rose, the steamer was on her way down to the rapids, and Marker himself took the helm to steer her through the dangerous reefs.

On previous voyages he had sounded and

## THE RED CIRCLE

charted the rapids, placed marks he could recognize on some of the rocks on either bank, questioned the local pilots—in a word, made himself familiar with every yard of the passage; and he kept the knowledge to himself, as a means of prolonging the period during which the *Tai-shan* would have the monopoly of the business on the upper reaches of the river. Only when the steamer had been deftly steered through the last rush of wild water, with the white eddies foaming over half-sunken reefs close by to port and starboard, did he hand over the helm to a Chinese quartermaster, and leave him to steer the ship down the miles of open water to the next rapid—a much less formidable obstacle to the navigation of the river, which now opened out amongst lower hills; for the precipices of the Tsung-ling pass were left behind.

After a refreshing bath and a change into a spotless white suit, Marker felt like another man. He had slept very little; but the first dangers and difficulties of the voyage were over, and he could now spare himself. Pursuit had been shaken off. The worst of the rapids were behind him, and there was a fairly clear run down to I-chang, where he hoped to find law and order still in possession. At the worst, he could run on to Hankow, where British gunboats were on the river. The only unpleasant thought was that of the fate of Père Gratien. To the last he had hated the idea of leaving even one European behind. But, then, he had done his best to bring him away. It was not

## DOWN THE YANG-TSE

his fault that the French priest was not safe on board the *Tai-shan*. He had saved all the others. If one was lost, it was the fortune of war and could not be helped.

As he made his way to the cabin he thought of Edith. Would he make an opportunity of talking alone with her to-day and settling the future definitely? No: he decided that it was as good as settled already, and it would be better not to speak further while she was, like all the rest, under his protection on board his ship. He had persuaded himself that she would say "Yes," but he thought that even in saying it she might feel he was making an ungenerous use of the advantage that the service he was doing to her and her people gave him. It was better to say nothing more for the moment, but to assume that his dearest wish would be granted in good time, and to live in confident hope that each day would draw him and her nearer together.

He joined his guests at breakfast in the cabin. Mr. Henderson reported that Lebrun was still sleeping. The clergyman and the two ladies looked tired after their restless night; but the children, delighted at the novelty of their surroundings, were in wonderfully good spirits, while De Visser's face had the air of a man who takes things as they come—his habitual matter-of-fact look that changed very little, whatever were his experiences.

Marker tried to cheer up the party.

"It's all plain sailing now," he said. "The

## THE RED CIRCLE

worst of our voyage is over. I'm afraid you have all had a bad night."

"Oh, no, Captain Marker!" replied Mrs. Henderson. "We have not yet quite shaken down into our places; and one does not sleep well in a strange bed, even if one changes from room to room at home. But we can make up for it by resting during the day."

"I shall have the awning rigged up again after breakfast," said Marker, "and you will find it cool and pleasant on deck. There's always a breeze under a steamer's awning. It's too hot below."

"I am sure," observed Mr. Henderson, "we can never thank you enough, Captain, for all your care of us. You are even thinking of little details for our comfort after saving our lives."

"That's my business," said Marker. "I have to take care of my passengers, and I never had passengers on board the *Tai-shan* that I thought half as much of."

He caught Edith's eyes, but only for a moment. She looked down, and then became suddenly terribly busy with spreading marmalade on biscuits for Ida and Herbert.

"I like living on the puff-puff ship," said the boy. "Shall we always live on the puff-puff, mamma?"

"That's right, my little man!" said Marker. "We must all make the best of things, as Herbert does."

"I should feel quite content," replied Mr.

## DOWN THE YANG-TSE

Henderson—"more than content, if it were not for the ruin of my work, and my fears for the good man we have left behind us."

"Your work won't suffer," answered Marker, cheerily. "Trust Sung to take care of it. What would we do without you here, with sick and wounded men on board? But I feel a bit bad when I think of the French Padre. We ought to have forced him to come away."

De Visser joined in the conversation.

"No, Captain," he said. "That would have been impossible. You did all you could. Remember how we reasoned it out together at the hotel. And now you are going to bring back help."

"It will come too late," said Marker. "There are days of running down the Yang-tse, and a still longer voyage up, steaming against the stream. It will be all over when we see Cheng-foo again."

"Do not be so sure of that," replied De Visser. "It may be that Père Gratien's life will be preserved. He may succeed in remaining hidden among his people, who are devoted to him. Let us hope we shall see him again."

"God grant it!" said the clergyman. "I would give anything to find him safe and sound when we return."

The long summer day was uneventful. The *Tai-shan* steamed rapidly down the river, helped by the stream. Under the awning the passengers found a welcome shelter from the tropical heat. Lebrun, stretched in a long cane chair in the cool shadow, showed signs of steady recovery.

## THE RED CIRCLE

MacMurdo came, and amused the children with wonderful conjuring tricks, and delighted Herbert by taking him to "see the engine go round." A trading-junk working slowly up the Yang-tse reported that all was quiet at I-chang when she left it days ago. A farmer from a riverside hamlet came off in his boat to sell chickens, fruit, and vegetables to the *Tai-shan*. When she anchored for the night, curtains and mosquito-nets were hung on the upper deck under the awning, to make improvised quarters for the passengers. When the start was made on the second morning, every one was cheerful.

The *Tai-shan* had not proceeded many miles down-stream that day when there was a surprise. As the steamer swept round a bend of the great river, and opened out a long straight reach of shining water, the lookout at the bow reported that there was a crowd of craft a mile ahead working up the river with sail and oar.

Marker was at breakfast with his passengers when MacMurdo came down from the upper deck with the news. He whispered to his Captain, and the two officers went on deck together, Marker turning at the cabin door to say:

"There are some craft coming up-river. I want to see if I can get any news from them."

"I don't like the look of them," said MacMurdo as they reached the deck. "There are a good dozen junks down-river with a thundering lot of Chinese Johnnies on board. They're not traders, and we must look out for squalls."

## DOWN THE YÀNG-TSE

Marker took his binoculars from their place beside the wheel, and, going forward, had a long look at the approaching flotilla. The morning sun was behind the junks and darkened their huge mat sails. There was so little wind that they were coming up slowly, helping themselves with long oars at their bows. MacMurdo had eased down his engines so as just to keep steerage way on the *Tai-shan*.

"They have soldiers on board," said Marker, "and a good lot of them. I can see the queer round patch on the front of their jackets, like a bull's-eye on a target. Rum idea, Mac, for a soldier's uniform!"

"If they're regulars," replied MacMurdo, "they are likely enough to be friendly. The big viceroys down the river are said to be as straight as a Chinaman can be, though that's not saying much."

"We must be ready for eventualities," said Marker, closing his binoculars with a snap. "Get the awning cleared away, the fire-hose connected, and arms served out—everything just as we had it for our little fight the day before yesterday. You see to it. I'll go down for a minute to reassure the ladies, and then I'll come on deck and bring up De Visser."

"Yes. He's a cool hand. If there's a row he can pick off a big mandarin or two as we run past them," said MacMurdo; and he called up the Chinese boatswain to pass Marker's orders to the crew.

By the time Marker had reached the cabin

## THE RED CIRCLE

again the *Tai-shan* was once more clearing for action.

Seated at the table, Marker, with no trace of anxiety on his face, asked Mrs. Henderson to give him a fresh cup of tea, and then very quietly said:

“We shall have some news presently. It may be very good news. There are a lot of junks coming up the river from I-chang, perhaps from Hankow. The viceroy at Hankow is the right sort. He wants peace with us Europeans, and plenty of trade along the river. There are two of our gun-boats, as you know, at Hankow. Perhaps that helps him to go straight. Now there are a fairish lot of what look like his regular troops on the junks. I reckon they are on their way to keep the peace up-river. If that’s so, we can give them a help on their way.”

“And we may save Père Gratien instead of waiting days and days!” exclaimed Edith.

“Just so,” replied Marker. “That’s what I’m hoping for.”

“But,” said Mr. Henderson, “suppose the revolt has spread and they are not friendly? Suppose those stories we heard about a Government move against the foreigners are true?”

“I believe they are all lies,” said Marker. “If you and the ladies were not here I might call them something stronger. But even if anything bad has happened, and these fellows mean mischief, we shall run down past them and carry out our original program. We shall bring the gun-

## DOWN THE YANG-TSE

boats back with us. But I'm hoping for the best, and I believe I'm right. Will you all stay quietly here, except Mr. de Visser? I want him on deck with me, as he knows some of the Hankow officials who may have come up. I'll send you down news pretty quick."

He went on deck with De Visser.

"There may be a bit of a row, after all," he said to him as soon as they were out of hearing of the rest; "and I know you can shoot."

De Visser looked round with his quiet, impassive glance, and saw that the ship was ready for action. The men were at their posts. Mac-Murdo, puffing at a long cigar, stood carelessly beside his brass cannon. Two rifles were laid near the wheel, and the sun shone on the rows of copper-cased cartridges in the open magazine. The engines were going dead slow, and one heard the plug-plug-plug of a steam-pump, and one of the crew was sending a stream of water over the deck from the nozzle of a hose.

Less than half a mile away, a flotilla of junks with dark sails and fluttering pennons dotted the river. Four or five were close together in front; others were scattered irregularly in a long line behind them. The rearmost was more than a mile away. The foremost vessels were crowded with armed men, who were watching the approach of the *Tai-shan*, whether in mere idle curiosity or with other feelings who could say?

"Stay here by the wheel, Mr. de Visser," said the Captain, speaking in his brisk tone of com-

## THE RED CIRCLE

mand. "But don't even take up that rifle unless I give the word to open fire. Then pick off the people that look like officers, or the steersmen of the nearest junks. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir," answered De Visser.

Marker walked forward to the bow, with a Chinaman to act as his interpreter. The sailor held the Captain's brass speaking-trumpet in his hand. MacMurdo walked aft to the wheel. Marker called out to him, "Half-speed ahead!" and the engineer passed the order to the engine-room by moving the handle of the indicator.

"You can pass any further orders to the engine-room," he said to De Visser. "You see how the thing works."

"You may rely on me," replied the Fleming, and MacMurdo went back to his post beside the gun.

The *Tai-shan*, helped by the stream, was now closing quickly on the foremost and largest junk, which had worked out ahead of her nearest consorts. A group of officers in embroidered silk robes had shown themselves at the bow of the Chinese ship, the crowd of soldiers drawing back to make room for them.

At last the *Tai-shan* was near enough to hail the strangers; and Marker told his interpreter to "sing out" that this was the British steamer *Tai-shan*, with Captain Marker, bound from Cheng-foo for I-chang, and that he wanted to know who commanded the junks, where they were from, and where bound for.

## DOWN THE YANG-TSE

A long reply came from one of the Chinese officers, but it was difficult to catch what he said. The interpreter explained that he thought the other was asking what the news was from Cheng-foo, and had said there was a general on board going up with the troops. Marker wondered if this was a shrewd guess of his interpreter or had he really heard it.

“Tell him there is rioting at Cheng-foo, and we are taking European residents away to I-chang,” he said to the Chinaman.

The message was passed on. The ships were now nearer. As the Chinese officer shouted a reply, the big sail of the leading junk was hauled down and a heavy anchor splashed from her bow into the water.

The nearest junks followed their leader’s example, and in a few minutes half a dozen of them were swinging to their anchors. The rest were closing slowly on them. The *Tai-shan* held on her way; and as she came abreast of the leading junk, Marker gave the order “Slow,” and De Visser passed it to the engine-room.

“He says he is sending a boat to communicate,” said the interpreter to the Captain.

There was no sign of hostile purpose in the anchored flotilla, and only looks of amused curiosity in the yellow faces that crowded the bulwarks of the junks. Marker came aft and gave the order to put the *Tai-shan* about, turn her bows up the river, and just keep enough speed on the engines to hold her against the stream. He

## THE RED CIRCLE

thought that the strangers were friendly, and he would soon have one of their officers on board to give full explanations. But he was not going to anchor. He might even yet have to make a run full speed down the river. He was pleased to see that the junks were anchoring along the north bank, so as to leave him plenty of room if he had to run past them.

A boat from the big junk was pulling toward him. He told De Visser to go below and let the others know that the new-comers seemed friendly enough, and he sent a message to his steward to have refreshments for the visitors laid out on a table on deck. The side-ladder was lowered, and he took his place beside it; with four of his men, rifle in hand, drawn up like a guard to salute the new-comers, and at the same time to impress them with the idea that the *Tai-shan* was something like the Hankow gunboats.

## CHAPTER XVII

### “TO THE RESCUE!”

COLONEL TING, staff-officer of General Wei, who boarded the *Tai-shan*, accompanied by a lieutenant who acted as his secretary, did not look very much like a soldier. He was, it is true, a tall, athletic man, and as he met the Captain he acknowledged his salute and the “Present arms!” of the sailors by carrying his hand to his cap in European military fashion. He had a long mustache, dyed coal-black, prominent cheek-bones, and small, twinkling eyes. To Marker’s surprise, he addressed him in excellent English.

“Good day, Captain!” he said, holding out his hand. “My general has sent me to ask you for your news, and to say that, if it can be arranged, he will be pleased if you can tow some of the ships up the river. He understands, if we have heard right, that there has been a riot at Cheng-foo. His orders from the Viceroy at Hankow are to assist in keeping order in the towns on the river.”

Marker took his hand.

“I am pleased to meet you, sir,” he said,  
195

## THE RED CIRCLE

ceremoniously. "Will you take a seat and let me offer you some wine?"

The two Chinamen bowed politely. Every one was introduced to every one else, then the newcomers settled themselves in the arm-chairs which the steward placed for them. Marker took his seat at the other side of a cane table, on which the steward placed a tray with glasses and two bottles with gold-leaf shining on their wired corks. Ting's eyes twinkled again. He knew enough of civilization to recognize a champagne-bottle. MacMurdo and De Visser had been sent for, and took chairs near the group. MacMurdo was introduced as the engineer and second in command, and De Visser as representing the railway company. Then Mr. Henderson appeared, and, to Colonel Ting's evident pleasure, introduced himself with a few courtly phrases in fluent Chinese.

The steward placed a colored Chinese bowl heaped with sweetmeats on the table, and an open box of cigars, and then proceeded to send the corks flying and pour out the creaming, sparkling wine. Ting appreciated the compliment. The young lieutenant who tasted it for the first time marveled at the wisdom of the foreigners, who could invent such a splendid drink as this.

Marker and MacMurdo, while they smoked and talked with their guests, kept a watch on the flotilla. There was no sign of anything suspicious. The crews and soldiers were taking advantage of the halt in their journey to get breakfast. At last Marker whispered to MacMurdo, "You may stop

## “TO THE RESCUE!”

and anchor”; and the engineer went away to execute the order.

Before this stage of confidence was reached Ting had told them some startling news. There was only too much foundation for the rumors they had heard at Cheng-foo, the reports spread by the Red Circle, the news that had reached them through Père Gratien’s correspondent: the north of China was ablaze with insurrection against the foreigners. In the provinces around the capital the movement was the work of a society known as the Boxers, of which it was even said that some of the princes of the imperial family were patrons. One of the ambassadors had been murdered. The embassies at Peking had been attacked. The European settlement at Tien-tsin was besieged by an insurgent army. The troops had joined the movement. The foreign warships had seized the mouth of the Peiho at Taku, and were sending an expedition up the river to the rescue of Tien-tsin. European, American, and Japanese troops were coming to attempt a march on Peking and the relief of the embassies. So far there had been great loss of life on both sides, but the trouble had only begun.

“And what will be the end?” exclaimed Henderson, holding up his hands.

“There can be only one end to it,” observed the Chinese Colonel. “I have been attached to our embassies at Tokio, at London, and at Washington. That is why I speak your language. And I have seen enough to know that these men

## THE RED CIRCLE

of the North, even with some help from the troops and the Imperial Princes, cannot defy all the world. It will be better for our country that the movement should be suppressed quickly without a general war. This is the view of his Excellency at Hankow, and this is why he is determined to suppress any attempt at a rising here on the river. We hoped to prevent any move of the kind, but we are too late in the case of Cheng-foo. We shall restore order. I know, Captain Marker, that you may well feel anxious, even suspicious. But we are friends and ask your help. If you wish, we will put hostages on board, among them my comrade, who is the son of General Wei."

"There is no need," replied Marker; "I am only anxious to help you. If I had any doubts I would not have anchored."

"How many of our ships can you take in tow? And when shall we reach Cheng-foo in this way?" asked the Colonel.

"This is Sunday morning," said Marker. "Towing that big craft over there, I can't promise to show you Cheng-foo till some time on Wednesday. But working up alone you won't do it till perhaps Saturday next. What force have you got?"

"Something like fourteen hundred men," said Ting. "Three battalions of drilled troops, about four hundred each, armed with Remingtons. A couple of score of gunners, with two mountain guns, and a pair of Maxims, and a lot of mule-drivers for the gun mules, and porters for the

## “TO THE RESCUE!”

ammunition. It's a useful force—not as good as Li Hung Chang's battalions up North, but good enough for our work, and I have taken a lot of trouble training them.”

“General Wei is the figure-head and Ting the man that does the work,” thought Marker. Then he asked how many men could be packed in the big junk.

“Three companies, about one hundred and eighty,” said Ting.

“Where are the Maxims?” asked the Captain.

“On board of two other ships,” said the Colonel.

“We can make room for them and a lot of ammunition on the steamer,” suggested Marker.

“Thanks! I will arrange for it to be done,” was the reply.

Marker could hardly repress a smile as he caught MacMurdo's eye. As old Naval Reserve men, both of them understood the gun, and with two Maxims on board the *Tai-shan* would become an armed gunboat, that could deal with hordes of Chinamen.

“Your general will excuse my visiting him now,” said Marker, courteously. “Will you ask him to come and dine with you on board the *Tai-shan*, when we tie up for the night? I will tow your ship up and take the Maxims. The rest of the fleet can follow. I will leave one of my men to help to pilot them through the Tsung-ling rapids. It's a nasty bit. I think we all understand now what's to be done, and we had better get to work.”

## THE RED CIRCLE

The Chinamen rose, exchanged ceremonious farewells with the Europeans, and returned to their ship.

Then there was an hour of energetic work. The last of the reserve of wood was passed on board the steamer from the barge. Her boats were busy bringing the Maxims and several loads of ammunition-boxes on board, helped by a couple of boats from the flotilla. At last all was ready. Anchors were heaved up, and the *Tai-shan* took the general's gaily painted junk in tow, and began her return voyage up the Yang-tse, with the fleet straggling astern, soon to be lost to sight.

Edith Kirby expressed the utmost delight at the news that they were going back to the rescue of Père Gratien, and in her enthusiasm caught Marker's hand and gave it a grateful grasp. Mrs. Henderson was less excited and a little anxious at the thought that her children, instead of being taken to safety down the river, were going back to the scene of civil war. Her husband reminded them all that it was Sunday, and proposed that he should read the service of the Church of England for the day in the cabin. Marker gladly assented. There were two absentees among the Europeans. MacMurdo was left in charge of the deck, whence he disappeared at intervals to see that things were all right in the engine-room. De Visser explained that he could not join in the liturgy of another church, and added that he would spend the time in devotions of his own, and that he would pray for his companions in danger,

## “TO THE RESCUE!”

and for those who were in still greater peril at Cheng-foo.

Walking up and down under the shadow of the awning, with his old prayer-book in his hands, De Visser wondered if Mass was being said in secret at Cheng-foo that morning, or if Père Gratien had already gone to his reward. He knew there was Mass at I-chang, and he united himself in spirit to the congregation there. Through the open skylight of the cabin he heard the voice of the minister reading the English service, and as he listened he added a prayer of his own that the barriers between them would be broken down, and that the light of the true Faith would be given to all those good and kindly people.

The day wore on, and to the impatient watchers on board the *Tai-shan* her progress against the stream seemed sadly slow. Landmarks noted on the way down—bold headlands, solitary farms, riverside villages with their painted pagoda towers—reappeared at wearily long intervals. Marker could only say that they were making as good speed as he expected. MacMurdo expressed his satisfaction at having been able to give his engines such a “thorough overhaul” at Cheng-foo. They were doing splendidly, and his arrangements for a reserve of fire-wood for the furnaces enabled him to make the boilers do their best.

On Monday there was a start before daylight. Good progress was made during the day, helped

## THE RED CIRCLE

by a strong wind blowing up the river. Marker held on after dark till he heard the roar of the Tsung-ling rapids booming down the gorge—a warning that further progress was impossible till daylight. Then he anchored and told his passengers, and sent word to Colonel Ting, that early Tuesday they would be in sight of Cheng-foo.

It was an anxious night. What would the morning reveal? In a few hours the worst or the best would be known. It was not easy to sleep. It was a relief when in the dim twilight of the early morning the shrill whistle of the steamer, echoing along the rocky walls of the gorge, gave the signal for the day's work to begin.

The sing-song chant of the Chinamen working the capstan of the junk anchored astern, the clank of the *Tai-shan*'s winch bringing in her cable, the hiss of escaping steam as full pressure came on the boilers, and then the thud-thud of the engines and theplash of the big stern wheel told that no time had been lost in starting.

Neither Marker nor MacMurdo appeared at breakfast. The Captain would not leave the deck till the rapids had been passed, and the Scot stood by his engines during the anxious time, till at last the wild water was left astern of the steamer and of the big junk that hung on the straining tow-rope.

Four Chinese gunners came on board with Lieutenant Wei to work the Maxims, and the crew of the steamer once more cleared for action.

## “TO THE RESCUE!”

They were getting so handy at the manœuver that they hardly needed an order now.

Marker came and snatched a hurried breakfast. MacMurdo took a more leisurely meal. The Captain told the ladies they must stay below, but Edith had made up her mind that, whatever happened, she must have an early sight of Cheng-foo, and had already chosen a lookout place on the side-walk of the lower deck.

There were still three hours of steaming through the long hollow in the hills where the Tsung-ling gorge opened on the more level country about Cheng-foo, and there was a sharp bend at the end of this approach to the town. It would be ten o'clock before they could hope for even a distant glimpse of the place.

The three hours seemed endless. The steamer, driving at the best speed of her engines against the current, appeared to crawl slowly up the broadening Yang-tse. As the sun rose higher the heat became intense. It was a cloudless day, with no speck of mist along the river. No junks had been met—a fact that suggested to Marker and MacMurdo that traffic down-stream had been stopped at Cheng-foo—not an encouraging sign of the probable state of things in the riverside town.

It was half past nine when the *Tai-shan* reached the lower end of the curve of the river; Cheng-foo would soon be in sight. The steamer's engines slowed down. The junk sent up her reddish-brown mainsail. The tow-line was cast off and hauled on board the stern-wheeler, and the order

## THE RED CIRCLE

rang down to the engine-room "Full speed ahead!" Freed from the load she had dragged up-stream since Sunday morning, the *Tai-shan* shot quickly out into the broad reach of Cheng-foo.

All eyes were strained to catch a first glimpse of the town.

There it was at last! With the binoculars it was easy to make out that there was a strange look of holiday idleness along the wharves of the river-front, where a crowd of craft were tied up. But even without such aid there was a signal of trouble in the black cloud of smoke that rose from the eastern quarter of the town and drifted out diagonally across the river.

"They have fired the French mission?" said De Visser, "and set all the neighborhood ablaze."

"I wonder is the English place safe," said Marker, closing his binoculars. "But for the smoke drift we could make it out, it stands so high. I fear it has gone hard with the Padre. God grant we are not too late!"

On went the *Tai-shan*. As she came up level with the town the dark sail of the war-junk appeared coming round the bend of the river far astern. Marker tugged at the cord of the steam-whistle, and its shrill note rang out across the water. At the sound, a crowd began to gather on the wharves. A searching look through the binoculars told they were unarmed—an ever-growing gathering of men and women staring with dull surprise at the returned steamer. The *Tai-shan*, which had fled four days ago, seemed to have

## “TO THE RESCUE!”

come again proudly to challenge a renewed attack.

“I shall go back and help the junk up,” said Marker. “It’s not far, but she sails badly, and minutes may be precious.”

The *Tai-shan* turned and swept down the river to the junk, gave her the tow-rope, and came steaming back heading for an opening among the crowded river craft at the wharf. The Chinese gunners stood like statues by the Maxims. The loading-belts were in, and the rows of copper cartridges shone in the sun. The crew were armed. Marker belted on a pistol, and Mac-Murdo came up from the engine-room and took his post beside his brass cannon. De Visser took a rifle and slipped some packages of cartridges into his jacket pockets with a feeling of grim satisfaction. In a few minutes they would be covering the landing of the Chinese regulars, and there was still a hope—slight though it was—that they had not come too late.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS

As the *Tai-shan*, with the junk in tow, closed upon the wharf, there was a general stampede of the people of Cheng-foo. Not only the crowd on the shore disappeared into every lane that opened on the riverside, but the river-folk scrambled ashore out of junks and fishing-boats and joined in the headlong flight into the town. The sight of the guns on the steamer's upper deck, and of the bristling bayonets of the soldiers who thronged the bulwarks of the huge junk astern of her, suggested an idea of revengeful massacre.

The *Tai-shan* stopped just opposite the open space, a man in the bow on the lower deck getting a hold of the outermost of three junks tied up to the shore. At the same time the war-junk began to haul inside the steamer, so as to lie close up to the wharf and land her men.

It was while this was being done that Mac-Murdo ran aft to Marker, and, pointing through a forest of taper masts to the gabled roof of the "hotel" farther down the wharf, exclaimed:

"By Jove, old Shanghai Jack is coming out on

## IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS

top! He's all right. See, he is running up a British flag on the pole on his veranda roof!"

"What luck if he has got the Padre there!" answered Marker, with a sudden revival of abandoned hope.

"We shall know soon enough," said De Visser. "I shall get ashore among the first of the troops." And he jumped down from the steamer's rail onto the bulwark of the junk, catching one of her ropes to steady himself, and then disappeared in the throng of Chinese troops on her broad deck.

Mr. Henderson slipped down after him, with an agility that surprised the sailors, calling out:

"I'll go with him. My Chinese may come in useful."

MacMurdo was about to follow, but Marker caught his arm.

"No, no, Mac!" he said. "Time enough. You must stand by me on the steamer. De Visser and Henderson will do all that can be done. See, they have got to Ting's side and are talking to him."

The two Europeans had made their way to the Chinese Colonel. Henderson was doing the talking, and De Visser was wishing he could understand Chinese. The clergyman was urging on the Colonel that there should be no useless slaughter. He asserted his firm belief that most of the towns-folk were either guiltless or misguided. He promised to obtain at once what he expected would be reliable information from the hotel-keeper, for whose good faith he said he was ready to answer.

Colonel Ting, proud of the discipline of his

## THE RED CIRCLE

drilled troops, replied that there was no fear of any reckless attack on innocent people. "But," he added, grimly, "the guilty will not be spared."

The junk was now grinding her painted side against the weed-grown timbers of the wharf. Some sailors sprang ashore and secured her to it. Half a dozen men, with little flags of various colors, landed and posted themselves at intervals along the deserted roadway; and then the troops began to scramble ashore and form in regular lines on the points thus marked out for them. There was an unexpected air of disciplined method about the whole proceeding.

Not many of the soldiers were ashore before the clergyman and De Visser had reached the wharf. The Belgian, rifle on shoulder, acted as escort to his companion, as he strode with long, hurried steps toward the hotel. In five minutes more they would know the best or the worst.

Quick as they were, Shanghai Jack had run out to meet them before they could reach his house. The Chinaman's face no longer wore the oily smile of benevolence with which he greeted and waited on his customers. He had a worried, haggard look, and there was hardly need for him to explain as he grasped De Visser's hand:

"I had a tellible time, gentlemen. I think often I be dead before you come back. They say me flend of the Eulopeans, and want to blaze up my hotel and kill me. If I had not good flend among the chiefs of the Reds, I never see you again. He save me, and I have to pay him—all my savings,

## IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS

gentlemen." And as he spoke a look of anguish came over his face that made it like a grotesque mask.

"The French Padre," asked Mr. Henderson—"is he alive?"

"No, gentlemen. I tly to save him. I tly to make my flend save him. I tly to find him and bling him here to hide in my house; but my boy come back and say he hide safe and no come. But all no use."

De Visser had expected the news; but, even so, it was a shock to hear it. He stood silent, gazing into vacancy, with tears in his eyes. Henderson walked toward the hotel, questioning the Chinaman in his own language. He, too, felt the blow deeply; but he wanted to get news as quickly as he could of the state of the town, so as to keep his promise to Colonel Ting.

. . . . .

Instead of summarizing what Mr. Henderson gathered from Shanghai Jack's somewhat confused account, let us go back to the day when the *Tai-shan* left Cheng-foo, and tell the story of the revolt in the town.

On the Friday afternoon, as Père Gratien was about to leave the mission station, he heard the loud reports of the firing on the river, without being able to do more than hope that the Europeans had held their own and got safely away. He knew that, whether they had failed or succeeded, it would not be long before the mob would attack

## THE RED CIRCLE

the mission. Accompanied by the faithful few who had remained with him to the last, he passed out into the street, adoring as he went the Presence that he carried with him, hidden in the pyx on his breast. He had no questions to ask of his companions. He trusted himself absolutely to their guidance, and hardly noticed that the street was deserted. The *Tai-shan*'s fight had helped him by drawing away all the Red Circle men and the mob that followed them to the river-front.

The guide of the party led them through a network of lanes, a labyrinth in which a stranger would have soon lost all sense of direction. At last he stopped at the door of a tumble-down house, in a street which Père Gratien recognized as one of those that were not far from the river, at the extreme east end of the town.

Evidently they were expected, for the door was opened before they could ask for admission; and they were welcomed by the householder, a man whom Père Gratien did not recognize as one of his flock. The room into which the street door opened was the workshop of a chair-maker. Tools, materials, and some unfinished pieces of furniture lay about in confusion, and the glow of a charcoal fire and the smell of heated lacquer told that the man had left his work to admit them.

Père Gratien hesitated for a moment, but Paul offered a reassuring explanation.

“This good man,” he said, “is not yet one of us, but he is an inquirer. I know him well, and answer for him. He will take you and me to a

## IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS

place of safety. It is better not to go first to a Christian house."

"I trust myself to you," observed the priest, addressing the workman; and, after a brief farewell to the others, he entered the house, accompanied only by the catechist, who carried the wallet with all that would be needed for Mass when the opportunity came to celebrate it.

Voices in an inner room told that there were others in the house; but the workman let none of his family see his guests, and himself brought them a light meal.

"You will not be long here," he said. "I am a poor man, but, with the help of Heaven, I keep the law. Before I lived in this house—who can say how long ago!—there were evil men here, and they had made a tunnel that goes under two streets and under the houses. I found it years ago, when I repaired the floor of this room. I left the planks loose there, under the bamboos heaped in the corner. There is an old ladder below, and we could go down in a few minutes. No one knows of it in all the town except those of my household and your servant here"—and he indicated Paul with a nod.

"How do you come to know of it?" asked the priest of Paul.

"Let me explain," the workman went on. "I told him three months ago when we spoke together. I asked him if there were not earth demons living in the ground, and he laughed at me. Then I said I had often heard them under

## THE RED CIRCLE

my house, in a passage running down to the river—a secret place that only I knew—and that he would hear them also if he came to my house."

"And I came and showed you the demons, and routed them," said Paul, smiling.

"Yes, he came," remarked their host; "and I shut up the doors, and we went down with a lamp, and it was as he told me. Before the light of the lamp a crowd of river rats went scuttling away, screaming as they ran. Those were the demons."

"Then you mean," said Père Gratien, "that I and my companion are to hide in this tunnel?"

"No," replied the other. "It is no place to stay in even for an hour. The water comes in when the river rises after the rains, and it is damp and full of pools. But it is a way to the river. They will watch the wharves, so that no one can cross them to embark; but my tunnel ends under the wharf, among the piles in an old door, weed-covered and hidden away. I can open it. We will go there when it is dark. We will be unseen even if there are a hundred watchers on the wharves. We shall be under their feet."

"But, then, how does this help? I do not mean to go away by the river even if there is a boat there for us. Had I wished, I could have gone with the English steamer."

"So they have told me, honorable sir," said the workman. "But you will consent to remain for some days hidden on board a ship on the river,

## IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS

close to the wharf. It is a house on the water. You will still be at Cheng-foo."

"But how are we to reach any ship unseen? And what ship is it?"

"My brother is a trader on the river. His ship is moored to the wharf by the hidden door. It is no chance; for I sent my son to him this very day, when your servant came and spoke to me of the tunnel and proposed that I should make it your hiding-place. I told him I would do better for you."

"You are kind and good to take so much thought and risk for me," answered Père Gratien. "God will reward you, and you will be one of us. Why not now?"

"There is much to be thought of," said the workman, "before I renounce the gods of my fathers. But our own teachers tell us that the stranger and the guest must be guarded even at the risk of life. I know many of your people. That is why I questioned your servant as to your doctrine. It is a good doctrine. In better times I will hear more of it. And now you will act as I have proposed?"

"On certain conditions," said Père Gratien. "First, you will promise to come to see me and speak with me of religion later on; or, if I am not here, you will come to whoever takes my place."

"It will be an honor," replied the other. "I promise willingly."

"There is another condition. Those who came here with me will believe that I am still with you.

## THE RED CIRCLE

They may come to tell me that some of my people are sick and dying, or that they are in the hands of our enemies. I must have their message at once. Can that be done?"

The workman thought for a moment and replied:

"Yes, I or my son will convey the message to you by the secret passage."

"Then I will go with you when the time comes," said the priest. "And now pardon me if we speak no longer for a while. I have prayers to say."

The workman lighted a lamp, after closing a shutter of the oiled-paper window. By its light Père Gratien began to read his Breviary. At a sign from their host, who seemed anxious not to disturb the priest, Paul helped to remove the pile of bamboos from the corner of the room.

The house was very quiet. The talking in the next room had ceased. From outside there came in a far-off murmur the distant shouts of a mob; and another sound, which all three recognized as the crackling reports of fireworks that accompany any demonstration of a crowd in China. The priest looked up from his book and listened; then, as if again concentrating his attention, went on reading.

"They are burning down our house and church," Paul whispered to his companion.

The Chinaman stole to the door, opened it and looked out. The catechist craned his neck and peered over his shoulder. The street was dark, for the sun had set and the short twilight was over;

## IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS

but the red glare on the sky made another twilight over the pointed roofs.

“They are wicked men and fools! They will burn down the town!” murmured the chair-maker. Then he closed the door and returned to his work.

He took a gimlet, drove it into a plank, and with this for a handle raised the board. Then he pulled up two more by their edges. A damp, earthy smell came up into the room; and below, there was the scuttling noise of the rats that had made their host think of the underground demons when first he heard them.

“It is time to go,” he whispered to Paul. “Can we interrupt his prayer to Heaven?”

In the quiet room the priest caught the words. He closed his book, crossed himself, and said, “I am ready.”

There were footsteps in the street and a knocking at the door.

The chair-maker acted swiftly. He lighted a candle from the lamp, slipped it into a paper lantern, handed it to Paul, and whispered to him, “Go down silently and wait below”; and then motioned the priest to follow.

They went down the ladder and found themselves at the entrance to a low, timbered passage, like the tunnel of a mine. Their host had rapidly replaced the boards and flung a mat over them. It was the work of a minute. Then they heard him go to the door and open it, and there was some talk in a low voice in the room above.

## THE RED CIRCLE

Père Gratien waited, leaning against the ladder and listening. If enemies had found the house, there would be a louder questioning of its owner. The quiet conversation above was reassuring. Presently he heard the boards at the top of the ladder being lifted, and his host looked down.

"It is one of your people, honored sir," he said. "He comes with a message to you. I told him I would send it on to you, and asked him if it could not wait till morning. But he insists that you must hear it at once, so I have told him you are here."

The priest climbed up the ladder, followed by Paul, who was glad enough of a respite from the chilling gloom of the damp tunnel. A young man was in the room, and Père Gratien recognized him as one of his flock—John Su, a riverside laborer, a cargo porter on the wharves.

The new-comer knelt on one knee and kissed the priest's hand; and to the question, "What is it, my son?" he replied by explaining that, after escorting the priest with the others to his place of refuge, he had gone home; and on arriving there had found his father seriously ill. Père Gratien remembered the elder man well, for he was one of those whose conduct had been a sorrow to him. For a while he had professed himself a Christian; then, for the sake of some worldly gain, he had abandoned the Church and gone back to the local temple worship.

"He fears he is dying, and he asks for you, my Father," said the young man.

## IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS

“And I shall go to him at once,” said the priest; and, turning to his host, he explained that the catechist would go with him, and that they might not be able to return that night.

The good man was obviously anxious to keep his guests in safety; and felt, too, some disappointment at not being allowed to carry through his well-devised scheme for their protection. He ventured on a respectful protest against the missionary’s running into danger, excusing himself for offering advice, and speaking of himself, in the fashion of Chinese politeness, as worthless and ignorant, but protesting his good will for his new friends.

“Do not say you are ignorant and worthless,” remarked Père Gratien. “For you are a worthy man and full of good counsel, and good-hearted, too, which is better. I cannot say how much I thank you. God will surely reward you. May He bless you!”

Then, with an assurance that he would return if possible, the priest went out into the street with his two companions. The red light on the sky told him the fate of the mission station.

“The work of years is being destroyed,” he said to Paul. “God gave. He takes away. His will be done!”

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE GOOD SHEPHERD

As Père Gratien turned his back on safety and made his way through the streets, with his two companions, he had not the remotest idea that he was doing anything particularly heroic. To obey the call of his sacred duty had by long use become almost an instinct. He was not thinking of the dangers to which he was returning, but striving to drive from his mind the feeling of disappointment caused by the overthrow of the work of patient years. This human feeling he was combating by repeated prayers for help to recognize in it all the mysterious working of God's Providence, and to trust the future of his beloved mission entirely to Him.

Following his guide, he traversed the network of lanes, where the houses stood so close together that there was only a narrow band of reddening sky to be seen overhead. In these lanes there was little movement of the air, and in the dull heat of the night the atmosphere was heavy with the smell of filth and garbage thrown from the houses. A new-comer would have feared some pestilential

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

infection in the very air. The priest had lived too long in the heart of the up-river town to pay much attention to such fears.

The guide turned sharply from a lane into a yard surrounded by houses, whose overhanging roofs nearly touched, and all but shut out the scanty light that came from the sky, now fiercely red with the burning of the mission buildings. There was a scrambling and grunting of some pigs, disturbed from their rest among the rubbish of the court. A door opened—an oblong of dim light in the darkness—and a woman held up a paper lantern that showed her yellow wrinkled features. Then, as she recognized the priest, she dropped on her knees within the threshold. He passed in, and she rose and followed him into the one low-roofed room that formed the basement of the house.

There was an order and cleanliness in the room that contrasted with the squalor of the court-yard. In one corner the sick man lay on a mat. He was fully dressed, for the Chinese workman sleeps in his clothes, and he had thrown back the colored rug that formed his bed coverlet, as if it were too hot for him. But his teeth chattered as the priest approached him.

He was suffering from a rapidly increasing fever, of what type Père Gratien could not judge; but he suspected that it was one of those sudden onsets of typhus that are frequent in the crowded lanes of the riverside towns. There was the dark flushed look in the face; the features were drawn, making

## THE RED CIRCLE

the cheek-bones more prominent than ever, and giving to the whole look of the countenance a grim resemblance to a skull. The dark eyes stared out brilliantly from under the deep arches of the grizzling eyebrows. But old Ah Su was quite sensible, for there was as yet no delirium. In Europe or America, the priest's first thought would have been of isolation for the sake of patient and people; but in this up-river Chinese town, in the midst of a revolt, it was out of the question.

"Leave me alone with him," said Père Gratien, as, seating himself on the floor near the mat, he put on his violet stole.

The wife and son went out with Paul, and stood in the courtyard, looking up at the red glow on the sky, listening to the murmur of distant shouting, and talking together almost in whispers. Steps were heard in the courtyard, and another man joined them. Paul recognized him by his voice.

"Good fortune that I have found you!" exclaimed the new-comer. "I came here for news of the Father. The men of the Red Circle are searching everywhere for him. They have searched the boats on the river, the inn where the Europeans used to go, and many houses. If he is here with you, he should go to some safer place. They hold the gates. We can not take him out of the town, and they are watching the wharves, so there is no escape by the river."

"He will be here some time," answered Paul. "He is with Ah Su, who is ill—dying, it may be. We must trust to God to protect us all."

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

"I will go for more news and come again," said the other. "If the Red Circle men move this way, I shall be here before them to warn you. God guard us to-night!" And, crossing himself, he turned and disappeared in the darkness.

Presently Père Gratien opened the door.

"Come in!" he said. "I have heard his confession and anointed him. He will now receive Holy Viaticum."

The woman went to the bedside, and, kneeling, bent over the sick man, speaking to him words the others could not hear; but they could catch the soothing intonation of the voice, that told they were messages of loving consolation. The son was helping Paul. He placed a small table in the middle of the room, and the catechist, opening the wallet, spread a white cloth upon it and lighted two tapers. Then all knelt as Père Gratien drew the pyx from his bosom and placed it between the lights; and the poor man's room became a sanctuary.

The woman, kneeling near the priest, bent forward, took the end of his robe and kissed it; then, looking up, said in a tone of touching entreaty:

"May not I and his son communicate also? We confessed to-day. It may be also our last Communion."

Paul spoke in a whisper to the priest:

"There is danger for us all. While we waited at the door we were warned that the Red Circle are searching the houses."

## THE RED CIRCLE

"It is just past midnight," replied the priest. "We will all share the Divine Gift. We shall all be prepared to die."

To one only—the poor wanderer who had just made his peace with God—he used the words of the ritual for the dying: "May the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ be to thee the Viaticum to eternal life!" To the others he used the usual words of Communion; but he felt that this might well be their Viaticum.

There was silence for a while, the priest kneeling in thanksgiving amongst his people. When he heard of the search in the houses, he had made up his mind that there would be no chance of saying Mass that day, while there was reason to expect that he would not live to see it dawn. And now, with a calmness that surprised himself, he was making the offering of his life as his thanksgiving. The words of the *Adoro Te Devote*, so often repeated after Communion and Mass since far-off days in his home and in the seminary chapel in France, had a more vivid meaning. In a few hours the veil of the sacramental species might no longer exist for him, and instead he would see his Master with face unveiled.

He approached the patient again, this time to give him a drink in which he had mixed a dose of quinine. Then he prayed aloud, suggesting simple words of adoration, contrition, resignation, love. At last he stood up, took off his stole, and signed to the others to rise.

Just then there were hurried steps in the court

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

outside. The young man sprang to the door to bar it, but there was a knock, and a voice said:

“Let me in. I am Francis Li.”

The voice was recognized and the door was opened. A young workman came in—the same who had spoken to the group in the courtyard not half an hour before. As he saw the lighted tapers and the pyx on the table, he fell on his knees.

Père Gratien took his hand and raised him up.

“The Communion is over, and the pyx is empty,” he said. “What is your news? Don’t speak loudly”—and he pointed to the dying man.

“They will be here before morning,” answered the new-comer. “I have news from a sure source. They have resolved to search every house in the quarter. You must come, Father, and hide elsewhere. Let us go to one of the shops in the Street of Benevolence. I have a friend there. They have already searched that street and found nothing. They took Song-li, the Christian dealer in lanterns, from his shop to the yamen. They beat him and tortured him with pincers to make him tell where you were hidden. He said he did not know, and that even if he did he would not tell them. He is a brave man.”

The priest clasped his hands together.

“I shall not hide any longer,” he said. “Find a place for the catechist Paul. He had better go back to where we came from. There is safety there. I will not have my people tormented, and their homes ransacked and plundered and their lives taken. I will go to the yamen.”

## THE RED CIRCLE

There was an outburst of affectionate protests. They declared that, not only they themselves, but any of the Christians, would suffer anything to save their priest, their father. Paul, without a trace of excitement in his deep voice, announced that if Père Gratien would go back and hide with him, well and good; but if not, he would go with him to the yamen.

The priest turned to his faithful servant.

"It is me they are seeking," he said. "If I go to them it may end the persecution of the others. Your life is valuable, for you can help them all till another comes to take my place. It may be that the magistrate will be able to protect me, by keeping me a prisoner at the yamen, and my being there will stop the search."

"He will not protect you, Father," observed one of the men. "He is himself a prisoner of the Red Circle chiefs."

"Even so," said Père Gratien; "it makes no difference. The shepherd must give his life for his flock. You have always obeyed me. Do not now oppose me. Paul, I command you to do what you can to save your life. No one must follow me to the yamen. In a few minutes I shall go out alone."

As if this ended all debate, he turned, and, sitting near the dying man, spoke with him again. The others stood whispering together, looking at him with a mist before their eyes. He put on his stole and pronounced the last absolution. Then he rose and handed the empty pyx to Paul, the

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

catechist, and spoke a few parting words to them all. Then, as if he were going out of his old house at the mission station on his daily round of visits, he went out into the night alone, just turning on the threshold for a last good-by and a last warning that no one was to try to accompany him.

Paul and the young man who had brought the news could not stay. They went as far as they could without actually disobeying their teacher. He had only left the courtyard when they slipped out after him, and stealthily followed him "afar off," keeping at such a distance in the shadow of the houses that they could just see the solitary figure walking steadily along street and lane, in the strange twilight made by the rays of the rising moon mingling with the glare of the conflagration that was now spreading to other buildings round the ruined missions.

The priest felt a calm, collected courage with which he would never have credited himself. He remembered his anxious fears in the first hours of the coming storm, and he almost wondered if he was the same man. He avoided the streets that led to the mission, and made his way into a lane that ran parallel to the river-front. As he approached the broader street, in which the buildings of the yamen stood, he could hear the confused murmur of the crowd, and again and again the sharp, crackling explosion of fireworks. The Red Circle men were letting them off to celebrate their triumph, and to keep up the noisy excitement of their followers.

## THE RED CIRCLE

Turning a corner out of the lane, he found himself in the fringe of the crowd. It packed the street as far as he could see. In the midst of it there was the smoky glare of torches; colored lanterns were tossing about on the ends of long bamboos, while rockets whizzed up and burst in the air above. The carved woodwork that canopied the yamen gateway shone bright with red paint and gilding in the torchlight. Above it, two long red banners drooped from the tall flag-staffs of the gate. Every one was shouting and staring at the gateway; and, to his surprise, Père Gratien found that, though many near him must know him, his coming was unnoticed.

He made his way inch by inch toward the gate, through the dense crowd that throbbed with a kind of collective insanity. As he went, he prayed silently for help and strength, and pressed his hand on the crucifix that hung on his breast beneath his outer robe. But he felt no temptation to pause or go back. His only anxiety was that the crowd might turn on him before he could meet their chiefs face to face, and, by surrendering himself to them, stop the search that meant endless misery and danger for his people.

It seemed an age before he was anywhere near the gateway. More than once he was all but borne off his feet by a swaying movement of the crowd. He had a sense of being crushed, suffocated in the hot pressure of this mob of excited men; and he squared his arms and struggled for

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

space and air, with a vague fear that he was going to be trampled underfoot.

There was a strange sense of relief when at last he made his way to the front, and found himself on the verge of a narrow strip of open space, kept clear by the leveled pikes of the yamen guard, who, some twenty strong, stood in line before the gateway. Behind the line an officer was posted —a man of inferior rank, who would be called a sergeant in a European army. To him the priest called out that he was the teacher of the Christians, and that he must be admitted to the yamen to see the tao-tai.

There was a fierce yell all around him as he was recognized. Rough hands seized him. One iron grip on his neck from behind almost strangled him. With a sudden rush the mob swayed forward toward the gate. The leveled pikes were caught by deft hands and their points tossed upward. The line gave way, and the crowd, with their prisoner in their midst, poured through the gateway, sweeping and hustling the guards before them. In a moment the courtyard of the yamen was packed with a dense mass of men.

A blow of some heavy weapon was aimed at the priest. His assailant was so hampered by the crowd that he had not room to give a sweeping stroke; but even so it knocked off Père Gratien's round cap and cut his forehead. As the blood trickled down his face he thought the end had come. But the end was not yet.

Three men, distinguished by caps and sashes of

## THE RED CIRCLE

bright red, had forced their way up to him and were dragging him out of the press. The crowd opened before them; for the guard, using not the points, but the heavy butts of their spears, helped to make a space by striking at heads and faces. There was a pandemonium of yells and blows, and then—how he knew not—Père Gratien found himself seated on the steps of the yamen door, with the Red Circle chiefs standing beside him, and a semicircle of fierce faces scowling at him from behind a reformed line of the guard. Torchlight and moonbeams and the glare of the sky made the courtyard bright enough to see everything.

He wiped the blood from his face and struggled to his feet. Of the three red-capped men near him, two were strangers. The third he knew by sight. He was one of the notorious bad characters of the town, suspected of more than one murder and connected with river piracy, unless popular report did him wrong. Teh-ding had come to the front amid the storm of the revolt, as is the way with men whose lives have made them reckless of consequences. To him—as likely to be, if not the prime mover of the rising, the strongest of the leaders now that it had come to deeds, not words—Père Gratien addressed himself:

“You have been looking for me. You may stop your search. Here I am. Take me to the tao-tai; or, if he does not yet command, tell me who is the chief.”

Teh-ding drew himself up proudly, folded his arms and half smiled, half grinned as he answered:

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

"His Excellency the tao-tai still rules, but he has left it to us of the Circle to manage for him. If you want the chief you can speak to me."

"I am at your disposal, then," said Père Gratien, very deliberately. "All I ask is that you will stop the search that is now useless. I am the last of the Europeans. The rest are gone, and I am your prisoner. If you act for the tao-tai, you will protect me. I have done no wrong."

"Done no wrong!" sneered Teh-ding. "A fine story that! But you want to save your life. You are like the rest of the foreign devils. They are brave enough when they can kill us with machine-guns, but they cringe for their lives when they are in our power. Well, I will save your life. You may be useful to us. But all my power, all the power of the Circle, cannot save you from that crowd unless you do what I tell you. Look at them. Listen to them. But for me and my brethren they would have already torn you to pieces."

Père Gratien turned almost involuntarily and glanced at the foremost of the crowd, and saw faces darkened and contorted with anger that seemed almost demoniac. He heard their cries, groans, and yells, more bestial than human—inarticulate outcries that almost drowned the shouts here and there of "Kill the foreign devil! Cut him asunder!" The terrible madness, that can make a mob do deeds that each individual in it would shrink from, was upon them all.

There was a moment of shuddering fear. Then  
229

## THE RED CIRCLE

he collected himself, with his right hand pressing the hidden crucifix, and his heart beat calmly again.

“What do you want? What do you mean?” he asked.

Teh-ding half loosed his red silken sash, and pointed with his right hand to a figure within the doorway—a bronze statue, green and black, of a seated pot-bellied Buddha, with head leaning forward in sleepy-eyed contemplation. A score of incense sticks fixed to its pedestal were slowly burning, and sending up thin columns of gray perfumed smoke into the hot, still air of the ante-room.

“Take this sash and wear it,” said Teh-ding. “Take my hand and swear on the edge of my dagger that you will obey and aid the Circle; then light one more of those incense sticks, and you will be hailed as a brother by us all, and be safe as long as you obey.”

“You mock me!” exclaimed the priest. “You ask me to do what is impossible.”

“Do you want your life?” put in one of the other leaders.

“Not at that price,” answered the priest, with a flash of human disdain mingling with the higher feeling of the moment. “I adore only the God of Heaven. Only to Him I offer sacrifice.”

“You fool, go to your death!” Teh-ding almost screamed out, as, with a sudden wrestler’s grip of the priest’s arm and wrist, he flung him through the line of guardsmen into the front rank of the mob.

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The attack was so sudden that its victim hardly knew what had happened till he found himself among his enemies, trying to keep his feet by gripping the nearest man. There was just a moment of fierce pain as blows and stabs came raining on him from all who could reach him—just one last utterance of the holiest of names, one concentrated prayer; and then darkness and tumult vanished in the everlasting light and peace of a new world, and he saw his Master face to face.

## CHAPTER XX

### TROPHIES OF VICTORY

Of the tragedy at the yamen, all that Shanghai Jack could tell Mr. Henderson and De Visser was that, during the night after the *Tai-shan* steamed away, the French Padre had for some reason left his hiding-place and gone to the yamen, where the guards had joined the revolt, and the tao-tai, though nominally still in power, was really a prisoner in the hands of the Red Circle chiefs; that the priest had been killed by the mob in the courtyard; and that a few minutes after he entered the yamen his severed head had been hung on one of the flagstaffs of its outer gate, amid the wild yelling of the crowd. Four or five of Père Gratien's people had also lost their lives, and their heads had been fixed on the gate. Some of them had been dragged to the yamen because they refused to betray their pastor, and there had also been a quest for Paul, the catechist, but he was believed to be safe.

The mission station had been burned, and the fire had spread to the neighboring streets, and had been stopped only by pulling down whole rows of

## TROPHIES OF VICTORY

houses. It was still burning itself out. For two days the revolted townsfolk had been more anxious to save the place than to do further damage; and the English station, occupied by the Red Circle chiefs, had escaped destruction, partly because Mr. Sung had taken care of some of the wounded after the fight with the *Tai-shan*. He had been spared because he was useful. Mr. Henderson afterward found, to his satisfaction, that Sung had run some risk by refusing either to wear the emblems of the Circle or to enter the local temple of the Goddess of Mercy. Nevertheless, the chiefs had been shrewd enough to protect him—all the more readily because two of them needed his professional help.

The clergyman went back at once with his news to the Chinese Colonel, while De Visser waited at the hotel, after sending out one of Shanghai Jack's "boys" to try to get into communication with Paul, the catechist. De Visser felt it his first duty to act as the protector of the martyred missionary's flock, and through Paul he could communicate with them and take the necessary steps, if indeed (as he hoped) the faithful catechist was still safe.

As he turned back along the quay, the clergyman saw that old General Wei had landed. He was seated on a chair, brought out from one of the houses and placed in the shadow of an overhanging balcony. An officer stood beside him holding his standard. Two others displayed the long placards, or tablets, on which letters of gold on a blue

## THE RED CIRCLE

ground set forth his titles. A few other officers stood near him, and a company drawn up in double rank acted as a guard.

Some of the townsmen had crept out of their houses and timidly looked on. A couple of gray-bearded men had approached the General, and were bidding him welcome and trying to make their peace with him. Henderson saw at a glance that this was the ceremonial part of the business. To the younger and more energetic Colonel Ting had been left the task of occupying the town. A question to the officer commanding the General's guard elicited the information that the Colonel had at once pushed on with the rest of the force to seize the yamen.

Before following him thither, Henderson went toward the steamer. Marker and MacMurdo were busy with some of their men helping to get the Maxims ashore across the decks of the junk. The Captain left his work, sprang on to the wharf, and came up to Henderson.

"What news of our friend?" he asked, eagerly.

"The worst," replied the clergyman. "He was murdered by the mob the very night after we went away. Don't tell the women yet. Don't let them land. The place is full of horrors. I feel sick at the thought that we left him here, though what else could we do?"

"I hope Ting will catch the murderers," said Marker, biting his lip and clinching his fist to control his agitation.

"Don't let us think of vengeance. In any case,

## TROPHIES OF VICTORY

we have nothing to do with it. God forgive these poor blind people! I must go."

As he went toward the yamen he realized with sudden horror that he was going to the scene of his friend's death. The feeling grew upon him as he entered the street and saw, with a vague, hesitating glance that took in no details, the great gateway of the Government buildings, with a company of soldiers drawn up before it. He feared to look up at it, for he knew what might be there; and for a few steps he kept his eyes down, and saw only the badly jointed square stones of the pavement. The street was strangely silent. The yamen had been occupied without resistance, and the frightened townsmen were hiding within doors.

At last, with a shrinking effort, he raised his eyes to the carved overhanging cornice of the gate. Above it rose the tall flagstaffs. The red banners of revolt no longer drooped from them. These had just been hauled down. But there was a grim memorial of the rising still unremoved; for from a line stretched between the flagstaffs four dark objects dangled against the deep blue of the cloudless tropic sky.

He knew at once what they were—human heads suspended by their long plaits of hair. With a shudder, he once more bent his eyes to the ground; but the sight haunted him. As he drew nearer he felt he must look up again, and he stopped and fixed his gaze on the ghastly trophies of victorious revolt. Two of the heads were turned, so that he

## THE RED CIRCLE

could only see the backs of them and the mass of severed neck muscles already blackening in the sun. Another dark-featured head was in profile. The fourth hung with the face inclined toward him —a pale face, with its features as yet undiscolored, but terribly changed by the relaxation of the muscles, the sunken cheeks, the hanging lower jaw. Still he knew it. It was the face of the French priest.

But then, all of a sudden, the feeling of horror disappeared. With a flash of realization it came upon him that such must have been the face of Paul as the executioner held up the severed head by the roadside without the gate of Rome; or of James, the son of Zebedee, after he had been slain with the sword in Jerusalem. The man with whom he had so lately spoken had trodden the same path: he had "fought as they fought in the brave days of old." He understood now something of the honors paid to the relics of martyrs. He would save from even irreverent touch, if he could, the heads above the gate; for they were those of more than heroes.

He found Colonel Ting in the courtyard, surrounded by a group of officers, sharply questioning three prisoners who knelt before him with their hands tied behind their backs. He was waiting for an opportunity to speak with him, when the sight of men coming out on top of the gate urged him to interpose at once.

He surprised the Chinese Colonel by telling him that the heads hanging over the yamen en-

## TROPHIES OF VICTORY

trance were those of friends of his killed by the rebels; and an order was at once given that they should be taken down and handed over to him. A soldier was told off to bring them down; and, giving his rifle to a comrade, he disappeared into one of the buildings, and presently reappeared, swinging a rough basket in his hand.

The clergyman, with a sudden sense of horror at the remains of the heroic dead being subjected to rude and irreverent handling, said to the Colonel, "I am going with him." Then, without waiting for permission, he followed the man up the steep narrow stair of the gate-house, and out upon the gangway to which its cornice formed a balustrade. From the high roof he caught a glimpse of his own home standing among the trees on the ridge. Nearer, a great gap appeared among the crowded roofs of the town—the wide ruined district, from which smoke of smoldering fires was still going up in thin black columns to the sky.

But he paid little attention to the view. As he passed through the entrance-room below, he had torn down a small curtain of blue silk; and now, preventing the soldier from even touching the heads, he unfastened them one by one, rolled them in the silk and placed them in the basket. In his work as a doctor he had often handled the dead, and never without a lurking feeling of repulsion. But now there was nothing of the kind—only a sense of affectionate reverence, not only for his dead friend, but for those also who had died with him.

## THE RED CIRCLE

He came down carrying the basket; and, as he thanked Colonel Ting, the officer ordered two men to go with him as his escort. With this guard he made his way quickly back to the hotel. His first thought was that De Visser had the best right to be intrusted with these rescued trophies of martyrdom. He would not let the heathen see them.

It was in the Belgian's old room above the veranda, looking out on the river, that he opened the basket. He had expected to see even the stolid Fleming break down at the sight of the severed head and the dead face of his priest and friend, but he was not prepared for what happened. De Visser turned back a fold of the thin silk and fell upon his knees. "*O mijn Vader!—mijn gelievd Vader!"*\* he exclaimed, breaking out into his old home language. There were tears in his eyes, and a strange look of intense grief changed his face, but in a moment it was bright again. He clasped his hands together and his lips moved silently. He was praying. Then he bent forward, kissed the dead face on the cheek, drew the covering over it, and rose with a smile on his face.

"We should envy him," he said. "*O mon Dieu*, why were we not with him?"

Henderson grasped his hand.

"I feel as you do," he said. "Why did we leave him? Yet we did what he himself judged

\**O my Father!—my beloved Father!*

## TROPHIES OF VICTORY

best. We must both try to show honor to his memory by helping to restore his work."

De Visser turned on him a look of glad surprise.

"You will be one of us," he said—"one of us Catholics?"

"I don't say that," replied the clergyman, as if collecting himself. "But I do say that if now, or in the coming time, you show me how I can help his people, or aid in restoring their ruined church, what little I can do is at your command—for his sake. Now I must leave you for a while and go back to the steamer, but I am not leaving the town."

He was anxious to go. He feared that if he stayed he might say too much under the sway of strong feeling. Then, too, he wanted to revisit the *Tai-shan* and prevent any chance of his wife and her sister venturing ashore. Cheng-foo would be for a while no place for white women. The dead were lying about in the burned district, a not unlikely source of pestilence; and there would be the horrors of official Chinese reprisals on the rebels.

So back to the *Tai-shan* he hurried. Marker and MacMurdo met him at the gangway with eager inquiries for news. He told them of the fate of Père Gratien, and the two sailors received the tidings with strong expressions of a hope that Ting and the General would not hold their hands if they caught any of the Red Circle leaders.

The clergyman found it no easy matter to calm the honest anger of his friends. It was the ap-

## THE RED CIRCLE

pearance of Edith Kirby hurrying up from the cabin to hear the news that suddenly silenced them.

"Is he safe?" she asked, and waited for the answer with wide-open eyes and parted lips.

The clergyman took her hands in his own as he said:

"We have come too late, Edith. There is terrible news. He was killed the very night we went away."

Her face whitened and she looked vacantly into space for a moment. They thought she would faint; but then she spoke with a strange calmness, though there was a quiver in her voice:

"I just hoped ever so little—that there was a chance. But I have been thinking—thinking—preparing to hear this. It would be more than one could hope for to see him again. He is surely safe with God. We should envy him, if we only realized it all."

"De Visser's very words!" exclaimed Henderson, as if speaking to himself.

Marker stared at Edith, puzzled at the rapt look that came over her face; and then he felt a sense of admiration for this sympathetic heroism of thought. With swift recollection he recalled her words on the night when Li-tsu was dying—how she had looked beyond mere visible things and told him that perhaps it was better the poor man should go now; that often, when people were dying, one saw that "the time had come that was best for them." He had called her "a little philosopher," and wondered at a young girl's

## TROPHIES OF VICTORY

speaking thus of death, seeing something consoling in it. Now it was plain that in this other death she saw a triumph—a thing to be envied. And he felt that she was revealing to him a new aspect of things—giving him a glimpse of realities about which, so far, he had thought little.

“Go, Edith,” said the clergyman, “and break the news to your sister and Monsieur Lebrun. You can do it better far than I can. I hardly knew how to tell you. Later on, when the first shock is over, I shall trust myself to tell you more.”

She hesitated a moment, as if she was about to ask a question. Then she turned quickly, and as she went away they saw her hands go up to her eyes.

“She’s a brave lassie!” said MacMurdo, as he watched her disappear by the cabin stair.

“That she is!” murmured Henderson. “But, all the same, she had better not see the ugly sights there will be in Cheng-foo for some days to come. I must ask you, Marker, to keep the ladies and children on board for some time longer.”

“You know I shall be delighted,” replied the Captain; then, pointing to the shore, he exclaimed, “Here’s some news for us!”

A Chinese officer was coming across the junk from the bund, holding a letter in his hand. He clambered on board the steamer and saluted the Europeans, as they turned to receive him.

“I bling letter for *Tai-shan* Captain. Colonel Ting write him,” he said, holding out a large envelope.

## THE RED CIRCLE

Marker tore it open. It was written on the red-lined paper used in Chinese official communications — a short note in Ting's excellent English:

SIR,—The rebels have abandoned the town on our arrival, and only a few prisoners are in our hands. I am informed that many have dispersed and are hiding; but an armed band is keeping together in the neighboring country, and I shall not be able to dispatch a column to hunt them down till I am reinforced. I request you to proceed as quickly as possible down-river and assist by towing up other transports of the flotilla. The military authorities will see that all services rendered are liberally paid for. I answer for this. I shall be pleased if the Reverend Dr. Henderson will remain here, as I shall ask his assistance in dealing with the sanitary state of the town. There is much sickness. Inform him that Mr. Sung, one of his employees, has reported himself to me, and states that Dr. Henderson's house and property have suffered little damage.

Marker read the letter aloud.

"A very business-like dispatch," he said as he ended. "I shall get away down-stream at once. I'd back up the Colonel, even if there was not one red cent to be made by it; and you say the same, Mac, I'll be bound!"

"With all my heart!" replied MacMurdo. "I only wish we could go ashore and shoot some of the scoundrels ourselves."

The Chinaman looked puzzled, for he only half understood what was said. Henderson, however, explained to him in his own language that he might return to Colonel Ting and assure him that all he asked for would be done. He himself

## TROPHIES OF VICTORY

would come presently and bring a formal note from Captain Marker to that effect.

So the officer bowed and made his way ashore. MacMurdo hurried off to his engine-room. Marker rapidly wrote his reply to Ting's note, while Henderson went below to explain to the ladies these new arrangements. They would be voyaging on the Yang-tse River for a few days. It would be better than being at Cheng-foo.

Mrs. Henderson wept and expressed her anxiety at leaving her husband in the town. Edith indirectly helped to comfort and reassure her sister by pleading to be allowed to land and assist in whatever work was to be done. This, however, Henderson would not hear of. He told her she must take care of her sister, the children, and Lebrun, and at last she accepted the arrangement.

In an hour a good supply of fire-wood had been hurried on board, and the *Tai-shan* was steaming rapidly down the Yang-tse. In the town military rule had been established. The civil government had disappeared; for the weak-minded magistrate had effectually resigned by taking a fatal dose of opium, in his terror at having to answer for his conduct during the rising.

Mr. Henderson and Sung were occupied with organizing a hospital, and directing the operations of Chinese working-parties who were clearing the dead from the ruins. De Visser gave some help, but devoted most of his time to getting the native Catholics together, and making an attempt to reassure and succor them with the aid of the

## THE RED CIRCLE

catechist Paul, whom he soon found, thanks to Shanghai Jack's assistance. It was De Visser who obtained from Colonel Ting the right to take temporary possession of a warehouse near the bund, that had been looted and cleared out by the rebels. In one of its empty rooms a humble altar was set up, and in the evening many of the little flock were gathered before it.

Speaking in French—which Paul understood well enough to interpret it phrase by phrase to their audience—the Fleming told them of Père Gratien's sacrifice and triumph, and promised them that there would soon be another priest to minister to them. He had sent down the river a letter to I-chang, telling of the pressing need of a priest; and this letter, together with Colonel Ting's dispatches, would be forwarded to the town, and would soon be in the hands of the bishop. Then all knelt, and Paul said the Rosary. De Visser answered in his native Flemish, his words lost in the droning singsong responses of the Chinese who knelt beside him. He was keeping his promise to Père Gratien, and it was a consolation to do something to make sure that his friend's work should survive him. He had never doubted that it would, but it was a pleasure to have some part in it.

## CHAPTER XXI

### ON THE VERGE OF A DECISION

By two short voyages up and down the Tsung-ling rapids the *Tai-shan* in a few days brought speedy reinforcements to Cheng-foo. The whole flotilla reached the town; and, leaving his General to hold the place, Colonel Ting marched out to disperse and slaughter the rebel bands in the neighborhood. Along the river valley there had been no other outbreaks; and the news from the North told of the collapse of the anti-European movement there. Rumor said that a great army of many nations was advancing victoriously on Peking. The worst of the peril had passed.

Now at last Marker, having done his work for the military authorities, was free to run down to I-chang, discharge his cargo and bring up another. Lebrun had recovered sufficiently to rejoin De Visser, and the survey was to be begun again. But it was considered better for the ladies and children to remain for the voyage on board the steamer. Order had been re-established in the town of Cheng-foo, but Chinese military justice was grimly claiming its victims; and fever, raging

## THE RED CIRCLE

in the crowded lanes, was gathering in still more. The *Tai-shan* was a place of refuge and peace—an ark in this new deluge of horrors.

Three new passengers came up from I-chang on the return voyage. There was a young French priest, Père Etienne de Kerouan, a son of Catholic Brittany, who had not spent so long a time as Père Gratien in China, but who had been there long enough to master its language and learn its ways, and who also spoke English. He won the hearts of both Marker and MacMurdo when he told them that he came of a family of sailors. He was the son of a naval officer, and had first thought of following his father's profession. He had even served for a while as an *aspirant de marine* on board of the training-ship *Borda*, so that he had been a sailor before he was a seminarist. One morning he had taken the helm of the *Tai-shan* for an hour, and showed that he had not forgotten what he had learned; and he took quite a professional interest in MacMurdo's engine-room, and discussed technical points with him in a way that made the Scotchman tell Marker later on that this was the most sensible Padre he had ever met.

With him came two Sisters of Charity in their white sunbonnets—the headgear of French peasants of three centuries ago, now known all over the world as the distinguishing mark of those heroines of mercy. One was new to China, for it was only a few years since she had left her convent school. The other was a veteran of the

## ON THE VERGE OF A DECISION

Chinese mission, with long experience of hospital and orphanage work—first at Shanghai, then at various places along the great river. She, too, had learned English, on account of her work with sailor patients in the wards at Shanghai. The younger Sister was anxious to acquire the same useful knowledge, and found a ready teacher in Edith. Père Gratien had often asked for nuns to be sent to Cheng-foo. Now his wish was granted.

For the first days, while the *Tai-shan* worked her way up-stream against the current of the Yang-tse, Mrs. Henderson seemed a little afraid of such strange companions as the two French nuns; but soon she became good friends with them. They were so fond of the children, and told her so many stories of the Chinese little ones in their orphan-asylums, that the mother's heart went out to them—all the more readily because they made no attempt to convert her, at which she was agreeably surprised.

On the first return of the *Tai-shan* to Cheng-foo, with a junk full of soldiers in tow, Mr. Henderson had told Edith all he had learned of the last hours of Père Gratien. The details had been gathered partly by De Visser from the native Christians, partly from the evidence given before the court-martial at the yamen. This was the story Edith told one evening to the nuns.

As she ended, the elder Sister, Sœur Eulalie, looked her in the face and said:

“To hear you speak, Mademoiselle, one would

## THE RED CIRCLE

think you were one of us. But, then, all generous souls, whatever faith they profess, can admire such heroism, such self-sacrifice."

"I hardly dare to say it, Sister," Edith answered, "but I am in heart almost one of you. Ever since the night I saw your priest, who is now with God, helping a poor man to pass happily into the other world, I felt drawn to his religion, though I know so little about it. And now his death has brought me so far that I am just hesitating on the brink, as one hesitates before a dive into chilly water. Don't tell Père de Kerouan or my sister or any one, but I think it must come. I did not mean to tell you. I shrink from it, yet I wish for it. And, then, I know so little and fear so much—one does not know why."

"Do not fear, Mademoiselle," said the Sister, in her sweet, kindly voice. "Pray, and all will soon be clear to you. The good God will work it all out for you in His own way. I shall say nothing. There is no hurry. I shall not speak of this even to you, unless you speak to me first. One must not rashly interfere with God's work."

They were seated together at an angle of the deck-rail in the cool shadow of the awning. The younger nun rose and went away. She thought the English girl might like to speak alone with Sœur Eulalie. And so it was; for Edith had begun to look up to the elder woman as a wise and motherly counselor.

"I am glad to hear you say that!" she told the

## ON THE VERGE OF A DECISION

nun. "I thought you would perhaps be anxious to urge me on and to make me a convert."

"No, no," replied the nun. "That is not our way. It is all between yourself and the good God. I shall be glad—so glad!—to help you if I can, but I would never try to force you forward. And now you must be under such a strong feeling after all that has happened. And to take such a decision one ought to be quite calm and collected. Is it not so?"

This further reassured the English girl. It was all so different from what she had anticipated.

"I like to talk to you, Sister," she went on. "God has sent you to me. There are so many things I have to think of. There is my brother-in-law. I have been his helper in the dispensary with the poor sick people. I have come to love my work there. I have learned so much that I have sometimes thought of going home to England for a while to follow a medical course and qualify myself for a lady doctor. There is so much that one could do out here if one was qualified. But he has always said he could not spare me, even for two or three years—that I am his right hand. Then there are my sister and the dear children. I would have to leave them all."

"But why, my dear?"

"Don't you see, Sister? He is a missionary as well as a doctor. Our house in Cheng-foo is the English Protestant mission. All the medical work is for the mission. How could I stay there if I were a Catholic? It would be a false position.

## THE RED CIRCLE

Of course, if I must go, I would sacrifice all that; but you can imagine how difficult it would be—what a break-up of all my life."

There was an unexpected answer.

"Tell me," said the nun, "do your sister and your brother-in-law think that you will live all your life with them—that you will never go out of their home to make a home of your own as the bride of some good man? You need not blush, my dear! It is what is best for most women; and the good wife, the good mother, is like something consecrated."

"I did not think *you* would say that," observed Edith.

"No, I suppose not. You think we poor nuns want every one to be like us, and the world to be one big convent. What a droll idea!" And Sœur Eulalie gave a happy little laugh. "But, my child," she went on, "you must have dreamed sometimes of a home of your own. Is it not so?"

"I have had all kinds of dreams," said Edith, looking out on the river—"perhaps very wild dreams. In these last days I have sometimes half thought that if ever I were a Catholic I should prefer to be just like you, and to go about in a Chinese hospital wearing that white cornette—at my old work in another way."

"A good dream, but *only* a dream, I think," said Sœur Eulalie, gravely. "We Catholics say that nearly every one of our girls at one time or another has thoughts of being a nun. It is a good dream, and it has a good influence on them; but few are

## ON THE VERGE OF A DECISION

really called to our life. Let us come back to where we began. Your people must have thought sometimes that one day you would leave them. Well, then—”

But Edith interrupted her.

“Don’t talk of it, Sister,” she said. “You are making the whole thing more puzzling. It really seems to me that if I am to be a Catholic—I don’t say I *will*, but if I am—I must also become a nun. To put it all quite plainly, I would not be allowed to marry any one but a Catholic; and I could not stay on at the English mission, and I could not live alone in Cheng-foo. I would have to be a nun, or go away and live in London as a medical student. I wanted to go there years ago, but now I hate the idea; for, after what has happened, I want to stay on in China. I have been here nearly all my life.”

“Don’t trouble yourself with puzzles and riddles, dear!” said the nun, soothingly. “And don’t let us go on talking, if it looks like a puzzle. God will make it all clear to you. Let me just tell you one thing. Here in China, in our little colonies of Europeans, so long as all the promises required are given in good faith, Catholics are often allowed to marry non-Catholics. It is not the ideal marriage, but if the Catholic is of the right sort it ends well. Now don’t let us talk any more. Let us go to your sister and the children.”

Why did Edith’s face brighten? The nun made a shrewd guess. Something seemed to tell her

## THE RED CIRCLE

that the Captain of the *Tai-shan* was the center of some of the girl's dreams of the future.

Marker treasured up the memory of the first anxious night at the English mission station, when, in a moment of strong feeling, he had told Edith what his hopes were; and her reply had been not a rejection, but a request not to speak of such things till that terrible time was over. There had been more than one occasion when chance threw them together alone on board the steamer, when he had been on the point of speaking again. But he had mastered himself, and kept to his chivalrous resolve that not one word more should be said on the subject that was nearest to his heart till she was safe again in her old home. It was a delight to be protecting her and those who were dear to her. A hundred trifles made him confident that, when the time came, she would say all that he wished for. He had noticed during these last few days that she had been more thoughtful, and that sometimes she appeared a little anxious; but he consoled himself with the idea that it was only the result of the long-continued stay in the narrow limits of the *Tai-shan*'s deck and cabin that was telling on her spirits, and that the return to the old home on the hill above Cheng-foo would soon make all right again.

On the evening after her important conversation with the nun he was pleased to see that she was brighter again. Round the dinner-table the talk was of the return to the town. They would be there next day. Their French passengers were

## ON THE VERGE OF A DECISION

full of eager anticipation. Mrs. Henderson was delighted with the idea of being in her own house once more.

"I shall be glad to be there," she said; "but sorry to part from you, Captain Marker. But, then, you will be often with us, and we shall be so pleased to see you. What would have happened to us all but for you and Mr. MacMurdo? I am sure my husband and Edith and all of us think of you both as the best and bravest of friends. We can never thank you enough."

Marker looked at Edith across the table, and then turned to her sister and said:

"It was our good fortune to help you and yours. I thank God I was up at Cheng-foo when the danger came, instead of being down the river. It was the best good luck of my life. But let us say no more about it now."

Next morning the loud whistle of the *Tai-shan* echoed along the wharves of Cheng-foo, as the steamer let go her anchor in the river. She had hardly swung to it when Henderson and the two Belgians were alongside in a native boat. Mrs. Henderson had that morning been seized with a sudden fear that her husband would be ill and dying when she arrived, and she flung herself into his arms as he boarded the steamer. De Visser, after a word of welcome to the English ladies, devoted himself to the missionary and the nuns, and delighted them with his report that the Catholic congregation had been kept together and was eagerly expecting the arrival of its new pastor.

## THE RED CIRCLE

Mr. Henderson, after a hurried consultation with his wife, surprised the Sisters of Charity by inviting them to spend their first day and night in Cheng-foo under his hospitable roof. He told Père de Kerouan that, after the troubled times through which they had passed in Cheng-foo, the fact of the Sisters' spending a few hours at his mission station could not lead to any misunderstanding, and it would make it easier to provide a home of their own for them. They thanked him effusively, but explained that they wished to begin life at once among the native Christians by spending their first day in a Chinese household. Later they promised to visit him.

At the wharf, a little crowd of Chinese folk gathered to welcome Père de Kerouan and the Sisters when they landed under De Visser's escort. He had a surprise in store for the priest, for he was able to show him the rising walls of the new church; the altar, little damaged by the fall of the old roof, and now covered in by a temporary structure, round which the church was being built; and in the garden a tomb where the remains of his martyred predecessor lay waiting for transfer to the building when it was completed. He did not say that it was his own untiring energy that had brought the authorities to take the rebuilding in hand at once; that he had personally organized and directed the work; and that by a happy chance he had recovered the remains of Père Gratien.

Lodgings were found for the priest and the

## ON THE VERGE OF A DECISION

Sisters, and early in the evening there was to be a meeting of the new pastor and his flock in the temporary chapel at the warehouse. After that was over, De Visser would go to see his friends at the English house. Marker and MacMurdo and Lebrun would be dining there. It was to be a kind of house-warming. Mrs. Henderson had insisted that all of them should come. She was delighted to find how little the house and its belongings had suffered during the disturbances.

“It all seems like a dream,” she said to Edith. “We come back, and it is as if we had never gone away. Here is everything in its place, and the old life is beginning again. It seems as if all trouble were gone for good, and now we shall have many happy years in the old place.”

And she wondered why her sister said nothing and looked so thoughtful.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE DECISION

WHEN, after dinner that evening, the Hendersons and their guests sat together in the drawing-room, it might indeed seem that all that had happened in the last few weeks was the troubled dream of a night. The place was unchanged; the room had the same air of cultured comfort; and the shaded lamps shone on the same little circle of friends that we saw gathered there on the night when Captain Marker first brought the Belgian engineers to the house. De Visser was absent, but he would soon come to join the party.

The talk was of the news of the moment. Order was restored in the North. A new era of peace and industrial development was to begin for China; and great things would be done for Cheng-foo and its trade when the railway works were in full swing, and it became an important river port. Lebrun was full of information as to what the railway would do for the place. He was an enthusiast on the subject, and MacMurdo drew him out with timely questions. There seemed to be a tacit agreement to keep the conversation away from the darker memories of the

## THE DECISION

recent past. Once, when the talk turned that way, Mr. Henderson put in a remark that brought it back to projects for the future.

Mrs. Henderson listened, and pretended to be fully occupied with some fancy-work; but she was watching her sister and Captain Marker, who had drawn away from the group and were seated together near the window that looked out on the garden—an open window with a screen of gauze to keep out the busy swarm of insects that fluttered toward the light and beat against the fine green meshes of the barrier.

"All danger is over now," Marker was saying in a low voice. "And all I have seen of you in those anxious days has made me long the more to tell you what you know I have been waiting to say—what I said here on one of the last evenings in this house. Give me the answer I want. Say 'Yes,' and make me feel it was all worth living through for your sake."

"Of course I understand," she replied in her simple, direct way. "But you must not think me ungrateful if I talk of conditions."

"Anything you wish," he said, eagerly. "I agree to anything—everything!"

She looked at the others to make sure that they were all attending to Lebrun's voluble, loud-voiced explanations. He had taken out a pocketbook, and was making a sketch to explain something. The rest were bending forward to see his roughly drawn map. Even Mrs. Henderson seemed interested.

## THE RED CIRCLE

"It ought to be an easy condition," said Edith, almost in a whisper. "I may ask you perhaps—for I myself hardly know yet—to be content that I should profess, not my brother-in-law's religion and yours, but Père Gratien's, and to go with me to have our marriage blessed at the altar where he used to pray."

"He was a good, brave man," rejoined Marker. "There could be no better place. I don't trouble much about creeds, and any place you choose will be holy for me."

"You called me a little philosopher once," she said, smiling. "Well, I came to think very seriously of things in those days when we were so near death—"

"Don't talk of death," he interrupted. "It's unlucky."

"We are not children or Chinese to talk of lucky and unlucky things," came the answer. "But I am thinking of life. I feel that perhaps my own life would be fuller, better, happier, if my faith was Père Gratien's. If I made the change, you would not be opposed to it?"

"God forbid I should oppose anything you think right!" he said with sudden earnestness.

"One thing more—in your busy life you have not thought much of these things. If I take this step will you try to think seriously of it all, and consider whether you ought not to do the same?"

"What is good enough for you, dear Edith, is good enough for me," he said, impetuously, taking her hand in his.

## THE DECISION

"That is hardly reason enough," she replied, drawing back her own. "But you will try to think it out."

"And you will help me. And now may I tell your brother-in-law it is all settled?"

"Leave that to me," said Edith. "I have so much to tell him—so much that may be a disappointment to him."

Then the talk was interrupted; for De Visser arrived, and all rose to welcome him.

Mrs. Henderson caught her sister's hand and whispered:

"I watched you talking in your quiet corner. You have said 'Yes.' Oh, I am so glad!"

And Edith puzzled her by whispering in reply:

"I hope you will be pleased, but don't say anything yet to any one."

Next day at lunch-time Edith was absent. Mr. Henderson asked where she was, and his wife told him she had gone to visit the French Sisters of Charity, to see how they were settled, and ask if she could do anything for them.

"They will be making a nun of her if we don't take care," said Henderson, laughing.

His wife could keep her secret no longer.

"No fear of that!" she said. "I know something." And she tried to look mysteriously discreet.

"Well, my dear, what is this wonderful thing you know so much about?"

"Why, she is going to marry Captain Marker! She accepted him last night. I'm so glad that I

## THE RED CIRCLE

*had* to tell you, but don't pretend you know. She asked me not to say anything."

"More fool she!" said Henderson, with a smile.

"Foolish to marry Captain Marker? I'm surprised at you, William!"

"No, no, my dear! I'm as glad as you are. But it was foolish of her to think you or any other woman would keep such a secret for twenty-four hours. Come, don't be offended! It's an old joke, and I won't give you away. I suppose she wants to tell me herself?"

"Yes, that's it. Here she comes!"

Edith entered, with excuses for being late. She said nothing of her own affairs, but during lunch talked of her visit to the Sisters, and told how she had found them quite happily installed in a native house—"such a wretched hole of a place," she remarked; "and in about as unhealthy a corner as one could pick out."

"We must persuade them to move into better quarters, if only for the sake of their patients," said Henderson.

Edith explained that they hoped to build a better house near the French mission for their projected infirmary, but it would be a plain native house. "They say they have left Europe for good, and that they don't think it would be wise to try to plant out a bit of it in China." And Edith glanced round the room, as if thinking of the contrast between her own surroundings and what she had seen that morning.

"Well," said Mr. Henderson, "every one is wel-

## THE DECISION

come to his or her own ideas, but I am pretty sure our plan is better. One can work better in decent comfort, and it is something to show these poor people what European civilization is like."

"But, after all," said Edith, "we are here to teach them Christianity, not civilization."

"Don't say that, Edith!" her sister put in. "Why, surely the two things go together."

Edith looked at her sister, silent for a moment, as if she were puzzled how to reply. Then she answered:

"It's a difficult question. I dare say I don't know enough to put my ideas quite straight; only I do think sometimes that we are trying too much to make English people of them."

"That would be absurd," said Henderson. "But we don't try to make ourselves into China men and women. How would you like to see me sporting a long pigtail, and to be toddling about yourself in shoes six sizes too small?"

He joined in the laugh at the idea of his wearing a long plait down to his heels. Then he went on:

"I see your idea. You think perhaps the French mission makes it plain that to become a Christian is not to give up being a Chinaman."

"Yes, that's it."

"Well, I try to do the same in a different way. Of course I admire the French missionaries. Their self-sacrifice, the way they identify themselves with the people, is admirable. But I'm not sure that it is necessary or advisable. It's a big question."

## THE RED CIRCLE

"Too big to settle over lunch," said Edith.

"And I dare say that you have plenty else to occupy your mind, now that we are here again," observed Mr. Henderson.

It was an unpremeditated attempt to lead up to more confidential talk, but the girl did not rise to the fly thus rather crudely thrown.

"Yes, there is a lot to do, and work is better than theorizing," was all she said.

Mr. Henderson rose.

"And I have a lot to do at my desk. You won't mind my leaving you? I shall be smoking and writing in my den for the next two hours."

It was a hint to his sister-in-law that if she wanted to come and tell him anything, she would know where to find him. As soon as he had gone, her sister urged Edith to give him "the good news" without further delay.

"I am not so sure he will think it good news," said Edith, mysteriously.

"Of course he will, you silly girl!" replied her sister. "He knows we cannot always have you here, and he admires and values Captain Marker as we all do. We owe our lives to him—everything."

"Well, I shall tell him presently and get it over," said Edith. "Now let us talk of something else. I want to keep my mind off the subject."

Her sister stared at her. She wondered why she appeared so nervous and agitated.

"Let me tell him for you, Edith," she suggested.

"No: I must tell him myself. You don't un-

## THE DECISION

derstand. Don't talk any more of it. I am tired."

Mrs. Henderson was more puzzled than ever. But she said no more.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### NEW TROUBLES

AN hour later, while Henderson was busy sketching out his report on recent events for the Missionary Society that employed him, there was a tap at the door and Edith entered.

“Can you spare me a few minutes for a talk?” she said, in a voice slightly trembling with agitation.

“Yes, of course. I am glad of an excuse to put these papers away. Sit down and make yourself comfortable.”

“I hardly know how to begin,” she said. “I suppose I ought to feel glad about what I have to tell you, but I don’t. It is all such a tangle, such a break-up of old ways!”

Henderson did not expect this, and he hardly knew what to say. With a sudden impulse he decided to help her to what he believed was the chief point.

“I can almost guess what is coming,” he answered. “You are going to leave your old home, Edith, to marry our good friend Marker. Is that it?”

## NEW TROUBLES

“Yes. But that’s only part of it.”

“I congratulate you with all my heart,” he said. “I could not have wished for anything better. Your going to a home of your own will of course make a gap in our pleasant circle here, but we must not be selfish. There is your happiness to be thought of. And, then, you will still be near us. You should be very happy.”

She let him talk on, but she seemed to be only half attending to what he said. Then she spoke:

“You have always been very good to me, and I am so sorry to think that anything I could do would be a trouble to you—”

“What can you be thinking of, my dear?” he interrupted. “There is nothing to be troubled about. You have been of endless help to me, and you will still be able to give me some assistance. I am delighted at anything that can make you happy. I would be very heartless and ungrateful if I said anything else.”

“You have always been very good to me,” repeated Edith; “and I know you are really pleased that I am going to be married, and quite ready to sacrifice for my sake whatever little help I could give you here—”

“Don’t look so serious,” Henderson broke in. “Let us stop arguing about it. When is it to be? The sooner the better, of course. It will be quite a festival for the mission. There has never yet been a European marriage in the chapel, and it will be quite an event for all our people.”

Edith took her courage in both hands.

## THE RED CIRCLE

"I am afraid," she said, "that we shall not be married in the mission chapel here."

"Why not? Surely Marker does not want you to go down to Hankow and have the Consul present? There is no need of that. All the papers can be sent to him to register."

"You will be very disappointed. I don't know what you will say or think, but I have already told Captain Marker that our marriage must be blessed before the altar where Père Gratien used to say Mass, and he has consented."

"What!" exclaimed Henderson, with a start of surprise. "What can be your reason? Pardon me, my dear Edith, but it does look as if some strange fancy has taken possession of you."

"I am not going to discuss my reasons," replied the girl, now quite collected. "I have made up my mind for reasons that are sufficient for myself; but it does not follow that I can argue about them or make you see the force of them. It is a matter of conscience before God. I mean to live in the Faith for which Père Gratien and his people died, and the most solemn act of my life must be blessed by the priest who has taken his place."

Henderson was silent for a few moments. He was rapidly picturing to himself all the possibilities that Edith's announcement opened up. She saw his trouble and agitation, and was puzzled as to what more she could say. The silence was becoming embarrassing, when he looked up and asked:

"You say Captain Marker agrees to all this?"

## NEW TROUBLES

"Yes: I made it a condition of my consent."

"Have you considered what it means? It will break up your sister's home here."

"Why should it?"

"How can it fail to?" he asked. "I don't want to say a word to pain you, but we must face the facts. Your—your going to the Roman mission will be regarded by the Society as a scandal. That is not what *I* say, but what people will be saying at the headquarters in London. Very likely some of our Christians here will go over after you to the other mission. I shall be blamed for it all, and I certainly shall be ordered to leave Cheng-foo. It means a trying separation for us all. And I loved my work here. I hope I am not selfish, but I must ask you to think of all this, and what it means to your sister."

"It's hard, I know," said Edith, with glistening eyes and a break in her voice. "You say you hope you are not selfish. Don't think *I* am selfish, either. My marriage has nothing to do with it. That is all a side question. I should go to the Catholic mission in any case. It is a matter of conscience, and it is a trial to me to think it troubles any one. But I must do what I see to be right. Don't you realize that?"

"Yes, of course. Nothing would make me happier than your marrying Marker, and I would make any sacrifice for it. But just at the moment when I thought we should all be happy together here, comes this separation; for that is what it

## THE RED CIRCLE

will inevitably be. Then it may all be a mistake, and you may find it out too late."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—and this is what I am very anxious about—I mean that perhaps, after all, this new idea of yours is the result of your being overtaxed and excited by all the troubled times we have passed through. The French Sisters have taken advantage of what is perhaps only a passing feeling, and talked you over into joining their religion."

It was a thrust at random, but it was promptly parried.

"No, no!" replied Edith, "that is not so. They told me not to be in any hurry to decide, but to think and pray, and not take any decisive steps except calmly and with full consideration. But it is not an idea of yesterday. It began the night that poor man Li-tsu died here, the night I first met Père Gratien. I felt even then that his religion was a reality."

"But tell me, what do your reasons amount to, after all?"

"Pardon me! I cannot go into a controversial discussion. My mind is made up for reasons that for me are so clear that I cannot shut my eyes to them."

"You are a Roman Catholic, then, I suppose."

"In heart and will I am. But they do not receive converts at once. There is instruction, preparation, probation—it may be two or three months yet."

## NEW TROUBLES

“So, after all, you may not join them—”

“Don’t think of that. With God’s blessing I shall. It is best to accept this as a fact, and there is no use discussing it. As for your anxiety about its effect on your own future, I will do anything I can to make things easier. I should be sorry to leave Cheng-foo; but, if it must be so, I could go to live at Hankow, and come sometimes to see my sister here.”

“Don’t talk of that,” said Henderson. “I don’t want to make any suggestion of the kind. I don’t see my way, and must think things out. Don’t say anything to your sister for a couple of days. It is all so puzzling!”

So the conference ended. Henderson, when he was alone again, tried in vain to settle down to his work. At last he pushed the papers aside, turned from the table, lit his pipe, and began to think over the new situation produced by Edith’s decision. Though he had argued against it, he knew her well enough to realize that it had not been taken lightly, and that it would not be easy to turn her from it. But he did not feel sure that he would act rightly in making any distinct effort to influence her in that direction. He realized that he had none of the old-fashioned Protestant hostility to “Romanism.” For him it was not an evil thing, but another and more elaborate way to the same end; unnecessarily complex, ceremonious, and exacting, it might be, but he regarded it as a real religion. If nothing else, Père Gratien’s life and death were enough to convince him of this.

## THE RED CIRCLE

"So," he said to himself, "it began with the death of that poor wretch Li-tsú, and the French missionary's self-sacrifice brought it to a crisis!" Suddenly there came to him the memory of his own feelings as he took the head of the martyred priest from the gateway of the yamen. Yes, that was how the missionaries of the earlier days of the Church had died among their people. He had gone himself to safety; but, looking back, he saw he had done what was right in the circumstances. Still it was more Apostolic, after all, to live without wife and child and home, and be free to stay on in the face of danger. Henderson was no selfish man and no self-flatterer. He had a way of looking straight at a hard fact, and he said to himself: "Well, he was the better man. Who knows? Perhaps this is all the appointed outcome of his sacrifice. Whatever happens, I am not sure enough of my own position to do anything to oppose what she holds to be right. I must trust in Providence, and let what will come." Perhaps it would be better to find work at home and educate the children in England. He did not like the idea of being censured and removed elsewhere by his chiefs. But he could not decide. He felt things were drifting.

He had joked with his wife that morning about the impossibility of a woman keeping a secret, but he himself now felt the difficulty of concealing from her the unexpected development that seemed so likely to affect his own position. He realized that, although he had told Edith to say nothing

## NEW TROUBLES

to her sister for a while, the respite could not possibly be a long one. Marker would be at the house that very evening, and it was inevitable that there would be some talk of plans for the future. He was still trying to puzzle things out when his study door opened, and there stood Mrs. Henderson all smiles. She came toward him, saying:

“Well, Edith has been having a long talk with you. I suppose she has confirmed my good news. We must give them a wedding that will be long remembered in the mission. I want to talk about it and have it all nicely planned for her.”

Before this direct challenge all his schemes for temporizing broke down.

“She has planned it herself,” he said; “and in a way that will, I fear, make our own position here difficult or impossible.”

“What can you mean?” asked the lady, in utter surprise. But as she spoke it occurred to her that Edith herself had referred in a mysterious way to the possibility of her intended marriage not being altogether welcome news.

“I did not mean to tell you about it for a while, and in the mean time I hoped to find a way out,” said Henderson. “But sit down and I will tell you what she has told me.” And then he gave his wife a very full account of his talk with her sister.

Mrs. Henderson had the reputation of being an easy-going, rather timid woman, who generally gave way to others and made the best of the

## THE RED CIRCLE

inevitable. Her husband was, therefore, not a little surprised at the sudden energy with which she declared that Edith was talking nonsense; that she must not be allowed to do anything so unnecessary, so mischievous as deserting the mission; that she herself would talk to Marker about it; that the French priest and the nuns were a set of designing conspirators, who had been playing on the feelings of a weak-minded girl; that Henderson ought to go to see Père de Kerouan and talk very plainly to him; that the whole thing was "un-English," and therefore detestable and impossible.

The lady was so voluble and excited that it was some time before Henderson could put in a word. At last he ventured to protest that Edith was not a weak-minded, fanciful schoolgirl, but a fairly hard-headed and clear-sighted young woman, who appeared to have thoroughly made up her mind, and who expressly denied that she had been influenced by the French people. They, on the contrary, had urged delay and full consideration before any decision should be taken.

"And so," said Mrs. Henderson, "you approve of her conduct! You don't mind her breaking up our home, disorganizing the mission, ruining the prospects of your children! I am surprised at you, William! You should exercise your authority in your own house."

"Now, my dear," protested Henderson, "do be reasonable! Don't make things worse than they are. What is the use of talking of my authority?

## NEW TROUBLES

I have no authority over your sister, and I fear very little influence. She has made up her mind. She takes it to be a matter of conscience."

"Conscience!" exclaimed Mrs. Henderson, with an angry lifting of her eyebrows. "A nice kind of conscience it is to follow one's own fancies and break up all the peace of the home she has had for years! Surely the church of her baptism, the faith her parents died in, is good enough for her. Why should she go off to a foreign religion? Surely you don't approve of that?"

"If I thought argument was any use," said Henderson, "I should try to dissuade her from it. But if she thinks it her duty to go, I don't see how I, as a Christian minister, can do anything to force her—even if it were possible—to act against her conscience. But at the same time I don't believe the Roman Catholics are doomed to perdition. Their way is not our way, but it seems to be a good way for those who believe in it. And as to its being a "foreign religion," I suppose Christianity itself was a foreign religion for all the Gentile world."

"I am surprised at you!" came the reply. "You are actually defending the Romanists. Is it Christianity to break up homes, to separate sister from sister, to disorder a household?"

"Don't let us get into an argument, my dear!" said the peace-loving clergyman. "But, by the way, there is an awkward text somewhere in the Gospels about the good tidings dividing kinsfolk from one another. I am only facing the facts.

## THE RED CIRCLE

Edith has made up her mind, Marker agrees to her idea, and neither you nor I can change it at all."

"Then I shall tell her plainly," said Mrs. Henderson, "that if she goes to the French mission, she cannot be married from this house. And I won't stay in Cheng-foo to see the day. And I can't have the children asking questions about their aunt having one religion and myself another. See here, William! You have had no leave of absence for seven years, and you have a right to one year in every six. Tell the Board at Shanghai you want to go home on leave. You can be appointed a delegate to next year's May Meetings in London, and stay on in England till the end of the summer."

"And then come back here. Is that your idea?"

"We can decide that later. My mind is made up that I will not be here for this unfortunate marriage," said Mrs. Henderson. "And perhaps it is better to leave Cheng-foo in this way, without waiting till the Mission Board censures you for the scandal and sends you off to some second-rate place down the river. Perhaps you can secure an appointment in England. I am getting sick of China, and I don't want to experience again what we have just lived through."

"Well, well!" said Henderson, who naturally gravitated toward the line of least resistance. "This idea of going home on leave is not a bad one. But what about Edith? If we beat a hurried retreat like this, it would be leaving her alone in Cheng-foo."

## NEW TROUBLES

"Let her go to her French friends," said Mrs. Henderson, angrily. "They can take care of her."

"Do have a little patience," pleaded her husband. "Don't talk to her in this vein. If we go, let her suppose it is not at our suggestion, but that I am recalled as a delegate to London. After all she has done for our hospital work here, surely she has a right to use this house as her home even after we go. That can be arranged with whoever comes to act as my *locum tenens*."

"I don't think," said the lady, "that any clergyman who comes here will like the idea, or that she herself will feel it is quite the right thing for her to start from this mission house to proceed to a marriage ceremony at the Romanist chapel. I shall talk plainly to her about it; and if she persists in this absurd idea of hers, I can't help it. She must take the consequences. But there is no use of our arguing any more about it. My mind is made up."

And with that Mrs. Henderson turned and strode out of the study.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### AN UNEXPECTED SOLUTION

IT was a disappointment to Mrs. Henderson to find that, while she was engaged in this somewhat heated discussion, Edith had gone out. She did not return for more than two hours, and all the while the elder sister was turning over in her mind the problem of what would be the best way to convince her of the mistake she was making, and what should be the precise form of the ultimatum to be addressed to her if she persisted in her resolution. She was fond of Edith, but it now seemed to her that all other considerations must give way to the necessity of protecting the interests of her husband and her children. She really regarded her sister's proposed change of religion, not so much as an apostasy, as in the light of an act of disloyalty to the Henderson clan, a desertion of the family standard, which was all the more reprehensible because it implied an adherence to a group of strangers and foreigners. She saw in it the destruction of all her own plans for the future, and it seemed to make inevitable a kind of plunge into the unknown.

## AN UNEXPECTED SOLUTION

As the hour approached for afternoon tea, the children made their appearance in the drawing-room, where their mother sat, book in hand, with a pretense of trying to read, but all the while running off into new trains of thought. She told them they must have tea in their nursery to-day, and soothed their disappointment with a box of many-colored bonbons. She felt she must open the discussion on the all-important question as soon as her sister returned. She was vaguely hoping that her husband might be called away for an hour or so, that she might thus be able to settle the matter with Edith alone; for she thought that "dear William" might be too yielding, might even side against her and take the part of the rebel at the critical moment.

But Mr. Henderson arrived as the servant brought in the tea-things.

"Where is Edith?" he asked.

"I suppose she is with her new French friends," his wife replied, with a toss of her head that expressed her opinion of them.

Henderson was anxious to avoid further discussion, and tried to turn the talk into an innoxious channel.

"I want some tea badly," he said. "I am quite tired of trying to get that awful report into shape. It must be ready for Marker to take down to Hankow, and he starts the day after to-morrow."

"You had better find room in it for an explanation of the coming secession from our mission,"

## THE RED CIRCLE

said Mrs. Henderson. "It will be rather awkward to know how to put 'a good face' on it. But you had better break the news to the committee."

It was no use. The one all-absorbing topic of the moment in the lady's mind was Edith's conduct, and her husband could not avoid it.

"I shall wait till it happens," said Henderson. "I don't think the committee want forecasts and prophecies. I am sending them quite enough to think about. And, by the way, I am asking the secretary of the local committee at Shanghai to cable my application for leave."

"So it is good-by to our home here! Is that it?"

"Now, now, my dear, you said yourself you were anxious to get away."

"I am sure no one is more sorry to go than I am," protested Mrs. Henderson. "It will be heart-breaking to leave the mission after all we have done to build it up, and to see our home here sold off by auction as if we were bankrupts and defaulters."

"Do let us have our tea together without making the worst of everything," said the missionary, imploringly. "Why, two hours ago you were urging on me this very plan of going to England on leave!"

"Yes—but I have been thinking of things till I feel quite miserable."

"Well, well! That application need not go. It can wait."

"No, it can't wait," replied the lady, with pro-

## AN UNEXPECTED SOLUTION

voking inconsequence. "It must go, unless Edith comes to her senses."

"You mean changes her mind?"

"I mean what I say. She is acting like a fool. I didn't believe my sister was capable of such folly."

The door opened and in walked Edith, taking off her wide-leafed straw hat as she came. A flush on her face told she had heard the last words. Henderson rose, and, with an embarrassed air, placed a chair for her near the little cane-work tea-table. Her sister looked up, silent, expecting her to break out into some protest or remonstrance against the opinion so frankly expressed of her conduct.

But Edith threw her hat on a sofa, took the offered chair, sat down and said quite unconcernedly:

"Give me some tea. I am hot and tired."

"We were talking about you," observed Mrs. Henderson, as she filled the cup.

"So I suppose," said Edith. "But we can find some more interesting subject of conversation. Where are the children?"

"They are in the nursery," replied her sister. "I did not want them here to-day. There are things we must talk about and settle at once."

Edith put down her cup and looked inquiringly at Mr. Henderson. He guessed what was in her mind.

"I did not want a discussion to-day," he said, deprecatingly. "But your sister guessed enough

## THE RED CIRCLE

to force me to tell her what I should rather not have talked about till we could see our way more clearly."

"Yes," said his wife; "I was to have been kept in the dark till it was too late. But I could not be hoodwinked. I know everything, Edith; and I must beg you, for the sake of us all, to reconsider this absurd scheme of yours, and drop it like a sensible girl."

"I have been reconsidering my plans," was Edith's reply. "I have talked the whole of them over with the Sister Superior at the French convent—"

"I wish you had chosen a better adviser than a stupid old French nun," Mrs. Henderson broke in. "I have no patience with an Englishwoman running after foreigners. You might surely have consulted *me*, your own sister."

"My dear Kate, I knew exactly what you would have said. If you force me to speak quite frankly, I knew that talking to you would not help me much in this case."

"Now, is that kind? You prefer this stranger to me! Is that what you mean?"

"Come, come, my dear!" interposed Henderson. "You know she means nothing of the kind."

"Of course I don't. Do let me tell you what has happened," said Edith. "I am sure you will see I have been doing all I possibly can to avoid any trouble to you or my brother-in-law."

"It looks like it!" exclaimed Mrs. Henderson. "You go off to this Romanist nun, who would like

## AN UNEXPECTED SOLUTION

nothing better than to give all possible annoyance to an English missionary. I shall tell her what I think."

"You might first hear what she has advised. Or perhaps we had better leave it all till you are calmer."

"I never was calmer in my life. What does the Frenchwoman want?"

"You are trying to annoy me," protested Edith. "Will you hear what I have to say?"

"Yes; we both want to know," said Mr. Henderson, ever anxious to throw oil on troubled waters. His wife was silent, staring at a picture on the wall, with an expression of submissive martyrdom on her face.

"First," said Edith, "let me assure you that Sœur Eulalie is not 'a stupid old nun,' but a wise, kind-hearted woman, who has not the remotest wish to give trouble to any one. She spoke of you yourself, Kate, and the children quite affectionately."

"I don't want her affection," interjected the lady referred to.

Edith took no notice and went on:

"I told her that I feared my being married here at the French chapel and then living on in Cheng-foo might cause trouble to you both, and might even lead to your having to hand over the mission and your home to others. It was what you said to-day, William, that made me fully understand this."

"And what did she say?" asked the clergyman.

## THE RED CIRCLE

“Before I tell you let me mention something else. I have quite made up my mind that I must become a Catholic, and I do not see how even next Sunday I can attend the church service here. Now—”

“Why not?” interrupted Mrs. Henderson. “Surely you are not a Romanist yet? And we are not pagans that you should refuse to pray with us.”

“Dear sister,” said Edith, “we can arrange nothing if you keep on trying to annoy me. You don’t seem to realize that all this is hard enough for me, and you are making it harder. I am sure William understands my difficulty, if you do not.”

She looked appealingly at the clergyman, and he intervened, asking his wife to let her sister say what was proposed.

“I regret your being so unsettled, Edith,” he said, turning to his sister-in-law. “But I quite realize that you may hesitate in your present frame of mind to join your sister and myself in the public ordinances of our church; and I see, too, that your not communing with the rest next Sunday may cause some talk and questioning.”

“Well, that will be avoided,” replied Edith. “The nuns have invited me to stay a few days with them—”

“They want to trap you in their convent, to break off your engagement, to send you off to one of their other places and make a nun of you,”

## AN UNEXPECTED SOLUTION

interrupted her sister, her voice rising at each phrase.

"This is too absurd," said Edith, at last losing patience. "If the matter were not so vital, I should say no more. I have not much more to say."

"Go on!" said Mrs. Henderson, crossly.

"I shall stay here till the *Tai-shan* starts for Hankow, the day after to-morrow," explained Edith. "Then I shall accept the Sisters' invitation. I shall complete my preparation for becoming a Catholic, and be received into the Church very quietly. There will be no fuss, no talk in the town. I shall stay with the nuns till my marriage—it will not be long. I have promised to help them with their infirmary. They want to train some native nurses. I can assist at the start of the work. All this is arranged to prevent any trouble to you and William. Père de Kerouan has no wish to make any sensation out of so small a matter as my becoming a Catholic and being married at his chapel instead of here."

"Well, you have settled it all your own way, and I suppose we have nothing to say to it," was Mrs. Henderson's comment; but, though she tried to conceal her thoughts, she really felt relieved. She had imagined that the French priest and the nuns were planning some kind of triumphant demonstration over what they would count as a victory won over the English mission.

Her husband was more outspoken.

## THE RED CIRCLE

"I must say," he began, "that it is very creditable to Père de Kerouan that he is taking this friendly course. And it is good of the nuns to help you. Of course we are sorry to lose you even for a while. If I could change your ideas on all this, I should try to do so; but I know argument is no use. I am just a little anxious about your stay at the convent. It is in the native town. It cannot be a healthy place."

"I am acclimatized enough for that," said Edith. "And it is a much better place than you imagine. You must come to see me there. Monsieur de Visser has had a gang of workmen busy remodeling everything. He has broken down partitions and made big, airy rooms, and tiled the compound, so that, instead of a dusty yard, it is almost a garden, with little trees in jars and tubs and some flowers, and a bit of veranda with cane chairs and a bench. He has done wonders. If I am not well, William, you shall know, and come with my sister to take care of me."

"Well, we must make the best of it," was the clergyman's final comment.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A CASTLE IN THE AIR

WHEN the *Tai-shan* steamed down the Yang-tse River two days later, Captain Marker was in the best of spirits. He was taking a letter to the Vicar Apostolic, and would bring back the dispensation for his marriage with Edith. He had talked with her of her plans, and he was in the mood to accept without question all she proposed. He had seen Père de Kerouan again, and settled that, on his return, he was to be married to Edith Kirby in the mission chapel. He had even startled the priest with a suggestion that all the trouble about the dispensation might be saved by his at once declaring himself a Catholic. But, to the Captain's surprise, the proposal had been declared impracticable for the present, on its coming out that Marker's reasons for the sudden conversion were hardly theologically sufficient.

"You see, sir," the Captain had said, "I don't pretend to know much about these things. I try to go straight, but I don't take much stock of points of doctrine. Miss Kirby knows a long

## THE RED CIRCLE

sight more than I do about all that, and what's right for her ought to be right for me. If she thinks it is clear enough and important enough for her to risk trouble with her people, and even to tell me, as she did, that, though she has honored me so much by accepting me as her husband, she would give up all her plans and anything else in the world if it stood in the way of her joining the Catholic Church, that shows she must have strong, clear reasons. And she sees further in those things than I do, and I would not mind letting her set the course for me."

Père de Kerouan had explained to Marker that he could not make an act of faith on the authority of even Edith Kirby, and had told him that the question of his becoming a Catholic must wait till he had time to judge for himself. This had impressed the Captain very favorably. He told MacMurdo about it, adding that it was not what he expected. He thought missionaries of all kinds were "ready to take the ball at the first bounce" when a new recruit to their Church offered, and that they did not trouble much about motives. "The French Padre is as straight as they make them," was his final verdict.

"Perhaps that is because he was once a sailor," suggested the engineer. "A man that can take the wheel in a bit of a rapid must know something about going straight. I like him the better for it. That good Padre knows more than preaching."

At Cheng-foo, in the quaint old house of the native quarter that had been improvised into a

## A CASTLE IN THE AIR

convent, Edith was preparing to be received into the Church—happy once more, after two wretched days that followed her departure from the English mission station. The time of trouble had been all the more trying because it was unexpected. She had quite realized that the actual going away from her old surroundings would be a trial, and had expected some feeling of home-sickness; but she was not prepared for the two anxious days and wakeful nights, during which everything was enveloped in darkness and obscurity, and it almost seemed that an inward voice was saying to her that she had deceived herself and was causing pain to others for reasons that were all baseless fancies. She had told Sœur Eulalie her trouble, and the nun had said:

“Patience! The sun will soon shine again. Pray and the cloud will pass.”

“But, Sister, I can hardly pray,” she rejoined.

But the gentle nun persisted:

“Pray ever so little, and wait for the answer that is sure to come.”

Then the sunshine had returned with strange suddenness and intensity, and all was easy. She was glad the dark days were over before she received an unexpected visit from her brother-in-law. The clergyman had come to the convent with much hesitation, in order to obtain first-hand evidence with which to meet his wife's repeated suggestions that Edith must be very miserable and in all probability was already ill, but would not let her people know anything was

## THE RED CIRCLE

wrong. It was on the afternoon of the Monday after her departure from the mission house. He sat with Edith under the little veranda among the trees of De Visser's miniature plantation. The Sisters had brought him tea, and Sœur Eulalie had surprised him by expressing the hope that he had brought a cigar with him and asking him to smoke it. He had accepted the suggestion with a remark that smoking in a convent was almost like smoking in church, and he really hoped he was not doing wrong.

His talk with Edith swept away any possible doubt as to her being quite happy in her momentous decision. He had some news for her. Often people overlook the most obvious possibilities; and, though they had not expected it, her absence, not only from his chapel, but still more from his dispensary, had been noted by scores of people. They had found out that she was at the convent. Some even said she had gone there to be a nun. Among the patients at the dispensary there were inquiries as to whether they might not go to the convent to be attended to by "Missee Kelbee"; and the clergyman had realized that some of them thought more of her skill than of his professional attainments.

"If you stay at the convent much longer," he went on, "they will be coming here to look for you. If you help the nuns in the future with their infirmary, I dare say some patients will drift away from mine. What a pity it is we cannot all combine forces! We shall soon have here

## A CASTLE IN THE AIR

in this heathen town two rival pulpits and two rival infirmaries, holding out competitive cures for soul and body. What a waste of energy it is, when one comes to think of it, and what a loss of power for good!"

He spoke as if thinking aloud. Edith struck in with a sudden suggestion without pausing to think whether it was practical or prudent.

"Why *not* join forces? You are the only skilled physician in Cheng-foo. There is not a European-trained Chinese doctor in the place. The native doctors are only quacks—'medicine men.' There are no nurses like the Sisters of Charity. What a splendid hospital you and they could organize together, and what great good it would do!"

"You forget, Edith, that our unfortunate differences as to points of doctrine stand in the way of your dream of united work even for the bodily health of these wretched people."

"Why should that be?" argued Edith. "The nuns would not ask whether a doctor believed as they did, but whether he had enough knowledge and skill for his work. No doubt they would prefer a Catholic; but at Shanghai Protestant doctors come to their hospital, and in France infidels are on the staff of public hospitals where they do the nursing."

"At Shanghai it is different," explained the clergyman. "The doctors are lay practitioners, not missionaries of a rival church. I am sure I should be glad to help the Sisters; but how could I close up, or amalgamate with theirs, our mis-

## THE RED CIRCLE

sion infirmary, which is the recognized machinery for securing influence with the people and making converts? You cannot fail to see that."

"Let me ask you a question, William. You won't be offended?"

"Of course not. What's the question?"

"Well, here it is. Tell me frankly do you think that when Père Gratien made converts or when Père de Kerouan makes them, either of them was or is teaching those people the way of damnation?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed Henderson. "Surely you know I am not so narrow-minded."

"Well, then, Père de Kerouan must be teaching them the way of salvation?" she said.

"I would put it differently," remarked the missionary. "I would say he is teaching them *a way* of salvation—a way, to my mind, unnecessarily encumbered with ceremonials and observances, but still a form of Christianity."

"And therefore good," said Edith—"not your way, but a harder way; and yet, all the same, a way that a great number of them are ready to adopt, and more would adopt if another way were not proposed to them."

"Very likely," said Henderson, thoughtfully. Then he asked: "Are you trying to argue me into becoming a Roman Catholic?"

"No, no!" answered the girl, laughing. "Don't be afraid of

the zeal

That young and fiery converts feel,

## A CASTLE IN THE AIR

as Byron puts it. I am just building a castle in the air. I was thinking, while we talked, of a European hospital here in Cheng-foo: the Sisters as nurses, myself allowed to be a visitor and helper, you the physician in charge—at once a doctor and a teacher, training one or two native students as your helpers, and finding in your work enough occupation; and not making the hospital a means of gathering converts, not troubling the minds of the Chinese here with a rival gospel to that which so many are ready to accept, and which you grant is good enough to save their souls, but finding common ground for good work in looking after the health of their bodies."

"Suppose for a moment this were possible, how should I make a living? One lives on air, I suppose, when it is a case of a 'castle in the air.'"

"Let me see! I think I can solve the puzzle. The hospital would be for the poor. But there are the native business men of the town, the government officials, the European colony that the railway will bring, the company's employees—you could practise and take fees among all these if you were not a missionary."

"I wonder what your sister would say to all this?" observed Henderson. "It is a very pretty castle in the air, but I am afraid it is no more substantial than that puff of bluish smoke from my cigar. So let us talk of other things."

Thus the discussion came to an abrupt end,

## THE RED CIRCLE

and soon after the clergyman wished Edith good-by and left the convent.

“I wonder,” he said to himself, “is that wild idea her own or did Père de Kerouan suggest it?” Then he suddenly made up his mind to see the priest before going home—not to discuss castles in the air, but to settle a point that had been in his mind for some time. He had thought of asking Edith about it, but it had occurred to him that the matter would be better settled with the Catholic missionary.

He found the priest at home, in the house that had been rebuilt beside the rapidly rising walls of the yet unfinished church. He was struck by the utter poverty of the place—the scanty native furniture, the absence of even the smallest object of European manufacture, the air of a makeshift halting-place rather than of a home. With a generous impulse to be helpful to a fellow white man, his first word, after the formal exchange of greetings, was to beg the priest to allow him to send him some furniture and rugs from his own house.

“Our place is lumbered up,” he said, “with things we make no use of, and that would be better here.”

“You are very good,” replied the priest, “and I do not know how to thank you. You must not feel hurt at my refusing your offer. I have all I really need here. I am quite comfortable. Tell me what I can do for you.”

Then Henderson explained that if it could be

## A CASTLE IN THE AIR

arranged, and if there was no objection to non-Catholics appearing at a religious ceremonial in the Catholic mission chapel, he and his wife would like to be there on the occasion of Miss Kirby's marriage. If it were a great public affair, he would not ask to come—in fact, he should hesitate about coming in such a case, as neither his own converts nor the Catholic Chinese would understand what his presence meant. But he said he had heard that the marriage would be private.

Père de Kerouan at once told him that he must come and bring Mrs. Henderson with him.

"If the bride and bridegroom," he explained, "were both Catholics, we should have had a great ceremony with the Nuptial Mass; but Captain Marker is not a Catholic, and the ceremony will be of the simplest. There must be two witnesses besides the priest, and I had arranged that they were to be my catechist and Monsieur de Visser. Then the nuns were to have been here, and Monsieur Lebrun asked to come, and Captain Marker said that Monsieur MacMurdo would be here, so of course you will come also."

"I am very pleased to hear it," replied Henderson, "and I thank you for the kind way you have arranged it all. I need not tell you it has caused me some anxiety. Naturally, I cannot look at my sister-in-law's change of religion as you do, and it affects my position here in ways I need not do more than refer to now."

"Ah, Monsieur le Pasteur," exclaimed Père de

## THE RED CIRCLE

Kerouan, "if there were not these unfortunate divisions between us—if we were all of the one fold—if you, with all your zeal and goodness and your profound science, could be working with me to save these poor people, body and soul—how beautiful it would be! But pardon me! I am saying too much."

"No," replied Henderson, "you are saying only what we must all think—that if Christians were not divided, the mission field would give a ten-fold harvest. But we must each do what we can in our own way. These divisions are not of our making, and unhappily we cannot end them. I serve under my flag, you under yours. I hope, however, they are not opposing standards, but like the regimental colors of soldiers in different corps of the same great army."

"I do not want to lead you into a controversy, Monsieur," said the priest. "But it seems to me that the regiments of an army have all the same orders and the same chief."

"I see your meaning," rejoined Henderson, "and I have no dislike to a friendly discussion. It is a good thing for men who differ to understand one another. I want you to understand me. I respect the Church to which you belong. Your Francis of Assisi seems to me quite Christlike. Your Xavier is one of my heroes. Your predecessor, who died a martyr's death, was worthy of such traditions. So I rejoice at any good work you do, and am honored by having you for a friend. But while I hold you are a messenger of

## A CASTLE IN THE AIR

the gospel to the unbelievers here, I consider I am doing the same work in another way—teaching a simpler form of faith, which I trust includes all that is essential; giving my converts—if you wish to put it so—a necessary minimum of doctrine and practice. We both teach in essentials the same truth, and we are both trying to lead them to the same Master. I am sure we shall find the gate of heaven wide enough for us both and those we try to bring there. In the light of the Vision we shall have at last the unity that has been lost here on earth."

"But," said the priest, "we pray—you and I—'Thy kingdom come . . . on earth as it is in heaven.' Surely the prayer of nineteen centuries has not gone for nothing. The kingdom is here—the unity is here. Can there be this distinction of less and more—an elaborate form of Christianity good for some, a simpler code of practice and doctrine for others? If I teach more than you do, my dear friend, and less is quite sufficient, should I not be laying on my people burdens for which there was no divine warrant? Let us not argue, but think of what I have said. Pardon my frankness. I would not be a missionary here in China if I were not eager to have every one know the living truth as I know it."

"You need not fear that I shall be offended at your zeal," replied Henderson. "I shall think of what you have said, but it is all so difficult! I can only follow the light that is given to me, and try to show it to others."

## THE RED CIRCLE

“And I am sure,” said Père de Kerouan, “that you would follow where the light led if you could see more clearly. Each must obey his own conscience. I would not for a moment try to force my own belief upon you. But when the question comes up, as it did in our conversation, one must say a word that may some day suggest a train of thought to you.”

So the talk ended; and Henderson went home half wishing that Edith’s day-dream could come true, but telling himself that it was impossible.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A MESSAGE IN THE NIGHT

THE Rev. William Henderson, as he made his way homeward, could not help feeling that on one point at least good Père de Kerouan had the advantage of him. For it was somewhat trying to have to be thinking always what view Mrs. Henderson would take of his proceedings. The French missionary was in this respect more of a free agent.

As he walked with a quick, alert step along the shady side of the narrow streets, the clergyman was wondering whether, for the present, he need say anything of his interview with the priest. He would certainly be silent as to most of the conversation. But at last he decided that it would be better to tell his wife at once that she was invited, with himself, to the marriage ceremony at the Catholic chapel, and not merely to the breakfast that was to follow on the awning-shaded deck of the *Tai-shan*.

He had expected that she would raise objections to the proposal, but he was agreeably surprised. She seemed pleased with everything—delighted

## THE RED CIRCLE

with his report that Edith was in the best of health and spirits, interested in his account of the reception the nuns had given him, and quite satisfied with the prospect of a visit to the Catholic mission station.

“Of course,” she said, “we ought to be present at Edith’s marriage, and it will be quite interesting to be able to see a Romanist ceremony without compromising our principles in any way. I am sorry Edith has got these new ideas, and I am surprised at Captain Marker humoring her so much; but we must make the best of it. And I suppose there are some good people among the Romanists. Mr. de Visser is one of them, and he is a very sensible young man. By the way, he was here this afternoon and wants to see you. He has just come back to town.”

De Visser had been away for more than a week, surveying in the country, and Henderson did not expect him back so soon.

“Anything important?” he asked.

“Yes; and I think it would be very good news, if our future were not so uncertain and everything so unsettled. But I hope all that can be arranged.”

Henderson thought that De Visser’s visit and the news he brought might be the explanation of his wife’s unexpected good-humor and new-found tolerance for the unfortunate “Romanists.” He asked what the message was.

“He said,” explained Mrs. Henderson, “that he is paying only a flying visit to Cheng-foo; and he has some proposal to make to you, as he wants

## A MESSAGE IN THE NIGHT

to give your views to the directors of his Company in a report he is writing while he is here. I don't pretend to understand all he told me, but it seems the making of the railway will be a much easier work than they first thought. They have found a good line of country to carry it through, and he is going to propose that work should be started at once, or at least the preparations for it. He says the old wharf here will be no good for landing materials. He is going to make another just beside the town, with proper cranes and all that. Then there are to be workshops and a lot of machinery. He will employ native labor, and he says that there will be some hundreds to start with, and then a few thousands as the work grows."

"Well, I am glad to hear of his success—very glad," answered Henderson. "But I don't see quite what it has to do with our fortunes here."

"I am coming to that. He says that, with this crowd of workers, there must be a doctor in charge, to keep things right and look after sick men and accidents. There will be a new hospital at the works; he has picked out a place for it already, and it will be sent up here in pieces that will fit together like a dissected puzzle or an iron bedstead. He says he might have a Belgian doctor sent out by the Company, but he wants to know if you could take the post. It will be well paid, he is sure; and he was very kind, and said he would like you to have it, if you could take it—"

"There is a lot to be thought about before one can say 'Yes' or 'No,'" interposed the clergyman.

## THE RED CIRCLE

"So I told him, and he quite sees that. He said himself that he did not know if your Society would agree to your taking a post under the Company. I must say it's very liberal-minded of the young man—seeing what his religious views are—to think of bringing in an English clergyman even as a doctor. I thought he would be too bigoted for that. Perhaps, however, it is Mr. Lebrun's idea. But, then, he said there might be another difficulty; for he means to have some of the French Sisters to direct the nursing staff and act as nurses themselves, and so he wondered if you could act with them."

"Well, I must talk it over with him. It wants a lot of thinking about."

"And I hope you will not decide without a talk with me," suggested the lady.

"Of course, my dear. Have you any idea already as to what we should do?"

"We must not be in a hurry," she said. "I am sure I don't know what to say. But if the committee does not object it would be a pity to refuse such a chance. We could go back to England with the children after three or four years of it. And it would give you an influential position here, and you could do so much good."

Mrs. Henderson was full of suppressed excitement about De Visser's offer, and somewhat disappointed at her husband having shown no special pleasure at hearing of what seemed to her a singular piece of good fortune. The fact was that Henderson, while he listened to her, was think-

## A MESSAGE IN THE NIGHT

ing of certain passages in his conversation with Edith Kirby and with the French priest earlier in the afternoon, and though he was not of a suspicious nature, he felt puzzled at the way in which De Visser's proposal fitted in with things that they had said—Edith's “castle in the air” and Père de Kerouan's plea for union. Could it be possible that all three had combined to launch him upon a new line of work in order to separate him from the English mission and open the way for his subsequent alliance with their own propaganda?

The suspicion took such strong possession of his mind that he made the excuse to his wife that he had some writing to do, shut himself up in his study, and presently sent off a letter to Edith by a messenger, asking her to send back a few lines letting him know if her “castle in the air” had been suggested to her by Père de Kerouan. The messenger returned with a brief note from his sister-in-law, in which she said: “Père de Kerouan has never in any way alluded to your work or to any such change in it as I spoke of to-day. All I said was on the impulse of the moment. It seems impossible, humanly speaking; but stranger things have happened.”

He felt a sense of relief at the point being thus cleared up. He did not like the idea of being the object of a kind of pious plot. But still there was the possibility that De Visser's plan had been suggested by the priest, and he felt a dislike for the idea that he told himself was not

## THE RED CIRCLE

quite reasonable. But, reasonable or unreasonable, the feeling was there.

So when De Visser came in the evening, and asked for a talk with him in his study, and lit a cigar and unfolded his plans, Henderson's first question was:

"Tell me frankly, is this your own idea or has Père de Kerouan been so kind as to suggest it?"

"To tell the truth," replied De Visser, "the first suggestion came from Lebrun, when we were talking things over three days ago in a wretched hole that serves as the inn of Pa-lin-tse. Lebrun deserves all the credit of the idea. I can claim only that the moment he proposed it I very heartily fell in with the idea."

"What does Père de Kerouan think of it?" asked Henderson.

De Visser blew a ring of smoke from his cigar and smiled—almost laughed.

"I have not yet seen the missionary," he said, "since my return to Cheng-foo. I dare say he would make no objection to our availing ourselves of your kind and skilful co-operation in our work. But I am not likely to mention it to him except as a bit of interesting news."

"You seem amused at something," remarked the other, with just a touch of annoyance in his voice.

"I ask a thousand pardons!" said the Belgian, stretching out his hand with an expressive gesture. "But I could not help a smile; for, to be quite plain with you, my dear friend, I saw again what

## A MESSAGE IN THE NIGHT

I have seen elsewhere—how you had that sufficiently droll idea that we Catholics are always asking our priests about everything we do, and never making up our minds freely for ourselves. My colleague Lebrun used to think so once, till I showed him how absurd it would be."

Henderson had recovered his good-humor in the relief at knowing that De Visser was not the agent of a deep-laid scheme originating in the rival mission. He told the engineer that his first impulse would be to accept any proposal that would give him further opportunities of doing useful work; and that the work would be all the more welcome because it would make them colleagues, and draw them both nearer to each other. But there were other points to be considered. He did not know what view his committee would take of the plan. To consult the heads of his Society in London by letter would take some time; but he supposed he could refer it to the local committee at Shanghai, who, if necessary, could cable to England—that is, supposing, on consideration, he decided to accept the offer. How long could he have to think it over? De Visser told him he would like to have his reply—at any rate, his reply subject to the decision of the Mission Committee—in the next three days; and so the conference ended.

Henderson sat up very late that night. He was trying to think things out, and the midnight hours were the time when there would be nothing to distract or interrupt him. It was a hot,

## THE RED CIRCLE

close night. There was utter silence, so deep that he could sometimes hear a night-flying insect, attracted by his lamp, dash at the gauze screen that filled the opening of his window, and once he started as a little lizard pattered across a paper on the floor.

He felt fairly sure that the committee would arrange for him to be allowed to take up the offered appointment. They would see in it an extension of the medical work he was already doing in connection with the mission. Materially it would be a great gain to him. The salary offered by the wealthy pioneering Company, with which De Visser was connected, would more than double his resources, and, as Mrs. Henderson had suggested, would enable him to retire and return to England in a few years, instead of waiting on in Cheng-foo until he could qualify for a pension from his own Society. This meant "going home" while he was still comparatively young, and giving an English education to his children without having to be separated from them by the whole length of two continents.

So far it seemed that his course was clear. But while he was thinking all this over, a new train of ideas had started. It had begun with his realizing that his work in the proposed Belgian railway hospital would in one respect be different from that which he did in the Mission Infirmary. The Sisters of Charity as nurses, if they exerted any religious influence, would be likely to draw the patients to Père de Kerouan's mission; and

## A MESSAGE IN THE NIGHT

if he thought of using his work in the hospital as an indirect means of attracting converts, as he did at his infirmary and in his consulting-room, it would be a case of rival influences to some extent neutralizing each other and perplexing the unfortunate patients. Perhaps this made the whole plan impossible. The committee might even make the presence of the Sisters a reason for vetoing it.

But this thought of rival interpretations of the "good tidings" meeting in conflict beside the bed of a sick or dying man called up to his mind Père de Kerouan's plea for union and Edith's argument for her "castle in the air." He remembered how she had urged that what the French missionary taught was, by his own admission, at least "a way" of salvation. "Not your way," she had said to him, "but a harder way; and yet, all the same, a way that a great number of them are ready to adopt, and more would adopt if another way were not proposed to them." And then she had told him of her "day-dream" of his working in a European hospital at Cheng-foo with the Sisters, and not making the hospital a means of gathering converts, and not troubling the minds of the Chinese with another gospel than that which so many of them were ready to accept, and which he granted was good enough to save their souls. He would have to be content to save their bodily health.

Suddenly he realized that the "castle in the air," of which she had spoken in the convent garden,

## THE RED CIRCLE

was shaping itself into the possibility of a solid reality. It had seemed a mere dream, the wildest of impossibilities, a few hours ago. Now it was possible. Could it be that his course was being pointed out to him? To follow up the new line of action thus indicated would mean that he could not combine the service of the Mission Society and the Belgian Company, but would have to choose between them and sever his connection with the mission. Much that he had at first hoped for from De Visser's proposal would have to be sacrificed. Materially, he would be no better off than he was at present, and he must abandon the pleasing prospect of an early retirement and happy years "at home" in England. But, on the other hand, there was the easy escape from what he now began to feel was a doubtful position. He had no conscious drawing toward the faith for which Père Gratien had died and which Edith was about to embrace; but there was nothing in it that greatly and actively repelled him. He had seen for himself what it could accomplish; and there recurred to him again and again Edith's argument that he was indirectly opposing the progress of what, he granted, was the spread of a living form of Christianity among the people. It exacted more from them than he would claim, yet many of them embraced it; and he offered a confusing message that held men back, not from Catholicity only, but from any form of Christianity, by this spectacle of warring creeds in a heathen land.

## A MESSAGE IN THE NIGHT

But if he were simply the doctor in charge of the hospital, he would be doing good work with the certainty that he was not obstructing the good work of others. If he were sure that the faith he preached was the one necessary way of salvation, the dilemma would not arise; but he was quite conscious that he held no such belief. There were, it might be, many ways. He recognized that a missionary who felt so absolutely sure of his position that he could admit no equal or no better way had a clear line of duty before him. But he held no such view. What was he to do? If only he could, like the missionaries of early days of whom he had read, hear a voice from the other world directing him! Was he only timidly abandoning his post, or was he following a call of conscience? It was all as dark as the night in the garden outside his curtained window. Oh, for some clear light!

Suddenly his mind went back to the day of his return to Cheng-foo after the Red Circle rising. As he leaned back in his chair watching the thin, bluish smoke from a cigar hanging in the still, hot air, there came vividly before his imagination the moment when he had stood on the carved gallery above the yamen gate and looked into the dead face of Père Gratien. There recurred to him the sudden sense of reverent admiration with which he had recognized in the man, with whom he had so lately spoken, the martyr hero, the good shepherd who had died for his flock, and a flock worthy of him—for he remembered the two

## THE RED CIRCLE

heads of the native converts swinging beside that of their pastor. He could not have analyzed the swift train of thought that brought strongly to his mind a new resolve.

He could not hope to make better men out of the heathen than those who had died with Père Gratien, and he would not try, at the risk of perhaps choking down here and there with his rivalry the growth of the new harvest that would spring from the blood of martyrs. "I will not take the risk of such a responsibility," he said to himself. "Others may do so, who feel sure theirs is the better way for these poor people. I could only do it if I could assure myself that what Gratien taught, what De Kerouan teaches, was and is in itself something evil; and, after what my eyes have seen, I cannot hold that view. Thank God there is another path of useful work opened for me! I have only a small sacrifice to make. My wife will oppose me and people will misrepresent my motives. I can't help that."

He felt hot and tired. He rose and drew the curtain from the window. A rush of whirring insect wings dashed past him as a score of strange creatures hurled themselves at the lamp on the table. He stepped out into the garden. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers. The sky was bright with stars, and the horned moon rising over the dim hills to the eastward gave just enough light to show the confused mass of roofs of the town below and the broad waters of the river. Not a light glimmered in Cheng-foo,

## A MESSAGE IN THE NIGHT

and the only sound that broke the stillness of the night was the far-off barking of a dog. He walked out into the garden that had grown up during his years of work at the mission, and there came for the first time the sense that it was no longer his own. He would have to leave that little oasis of beauty and comfort and make himself a new home. "Mrs. Henderson will be sorry and the children will miss it," he said to himself as he turned back to the house. "But I must go where I can clearly see my way."

## CHAPTER XXVII

### SUNSHINE AFTER STORM

MRS. HENDERSON was pleased to hear that her husband had decided to allow De Visser to suggest his appointment as medical officer in charge of the proposed new hospital. For the present he said nothing of the motives that had prompted him to take this course. He felt that his wife would hardly understand them, and he was anxious not to raise any point that might lead to friction between them till after Edith's marriage. But he warned her not to indulge as yet in plans based on De Visser's proposal being adopted by the Belgian Company, and pointed out that the Missionary Society might raise objections to his accepting it. So their outlook for the future must remain uncertain for a while.

Edith Kirby had heard no news from the outside world since the clergyman's visit to the convent, and had no suspicion that events might be shaping toward a state of things in which her "castle in the air" would come down from cloud-land and assume a very solid and practical form. Nor did she realize that her own following of the

## SUNSHINE AFTER STORM

light that had been granted to her was the first step in the gathering in of a harvest won by Père Gratien's self-sacrifice. Outside events and future possibilities had disappeared from her mind for a while, and she was dwelling amid thoughts of eternal things, in the presence of which all ideas of self-importance had dwindled to insignificance. She was making a few days of "retreat" in final preparation for her reception into the Church, and there had come to her the restful concentration of heart and mind in the spiritual work of that time of grace. Now that they were no longer the subject of mere instruction but of prayerful meditation, truths new and old, things she had believed from childhood, and new doctrines she had lately learned to know as God's revelation, seemed to be grouping themselves together in one harmonious reality; even the most familiar truths taking a new value and significance as they fitted into their place in the marvelous scheme that made the past, the present, and the future, in time and in eternity, a mirror of God's goodness.

Every morning she went with the nuns to hear Mass in the mission church. The end nearest the sanctuary had been roofed in, and a rough shed erected between the main walls formed a temporary nave. On the Saturday morning she waited with her two companions until the little congregation had dispersed; and then the priest and his native catechist came from the sacristy, and there was the service of reconciliation—the conditional baptism, the confession, that had

## THE RED CIRCLE

once seemed a terrible trial waiting in the near future, but which was now so strangely easy and so full of consolation. Then she went back to her convent room, and next morning knelt among the Chinese Christians at the altar rail to receive her First Communion, and to feel how the reality of the great mystery of love and grace was far beyond all imagination and all anticipation.

As she came out into the courtyard of the church, escorted by the Sisters, she found a crowd of people waiting for her—a Chinese crowd—men, women, and children, nearly all poor working folk. With an air of grave respect, men bowed and murmured their congratulations. Children looked up smiling. A woman pressed forward and gave her a few flowers and said, "You are our sister now, and you will help us even more." And Edith remembered her as a patient two years ago at the English infirmary. It was pleasant to be able to say a word of thanks to her new friends in their own language. And then she saw De Visser making his way through the crowd. He grasped her hand as he said, "This is a happy day for us all." Then he gave her a rosary, and added, "Keep this *en souvenir*."—"You are very kind," she answered. "I cannot thank you enough for your congratulations." But she was longing to be alone again, and glad to escape from the friendly crowd. It was a pleasure to be back in the convent, and to have one more quiet day with the nuns before the round of life began again.

## SUNSHINE AFTER STORM

Next morning, as she went to Mass with the Sisters, the shrill, screaming note of a steam whistle echoed over the town; and Sister Eulalie, looking up with a smile from under her white cornette, whispered, "He has come back to you," and then relapsed into recollected silence. The whistle was the *Tai-shan's* greeting to all Marker's friends in Cheng-foo, as he brought his steamer up to her anchorage before the town. The ship had hardly swung to her anchor when he was on his way ashore, after turning over to MacMurdo all the business of starting the landing of his cargo. He had a round of visits to make, and something more important to arrange than anything connected with the *Tai-shan's* affairs.

De Visser met him at the wharf, told him all was well with Edith, and took off his hands the letters for the few Europeans in the place, promising immediate delivery for a package addressed to Père de Kerouan, which contained among other documents the dispensation for the coming marriage. Then he hurried off to the convent. De Visser went with him to show him the way. It was well that he did; for the native portress at the gate could speak only French and Chinese; and Marker's only available languages were English and "pidgin," the Chinese English of the river ports. It was De Visser who, acting as interpreter, explained that the Sisters and Miss Kirby were away at church, and would not return for three-quarters of an hour.

"I must see her," said Marker. "Let us go

## THE RED CIRCLE

to the church—if there is no objection to my going in. Then I can come back with her."

De Visser agreed, and led the way to the mission chapel. It was the first time that the sailor had entered a Catholic church. As they crossed the courtyard he said to De Visser:

"You will have to pilot me. I don't know my bearings, and I want to do the right thing."

De Visser told him that, in order to avoid disturbing the congregation, they would remain near the door. He passed in before him, and genuflected. The Captain imitated him. As he rose he had a vague sense of his surroundings, taking in no details at first. There were no windows in the temporary nave. In the half-light, he saw scattered kneeling figures in native dress. Beyond, the chancel was bright with the morning sunlight. There was the figure of the priest in red and gold, and candles burning, and flowers; and then in a group of worshipers near the altar rail he saw the large white cornettes of the two Sisters, and between them a bent head in a blue veil. At first he did not realize that this was Edith.

He had expected to hear hymns being sung or a clergyman reading prayers. The utter silence of the place first puzzled and then impressed him. A blue-robed Chinaman rose and brought two chairs, with long backs and very low rush seats. Marker sat down on one, but then rose with a feeling of embarrassment when he saw De Visser turn the back of the chair to the altar and kneel on the low seat. He imitated him, and suf-

## SUNSHINE AFTER STORM

fered much discomfort—a French prie-dieu chair being an instrument of torture until one discovers the precise position that keeps the shinbone from contact with a sharp wooden edge.

It was a relief to Marker to find that no one took any notice of him. He had expected to be stared at, but even some children kneeling close by did not turn their heads to glance at him for a moment. Every one seemed to be absorbed in what was happening in the sunlit sanctuary. Even De Visser seemed to have forgotten him, and was kneeling with clasped hands, and eyes fixed on the altar. Marker wondered that he did not produce a hymn-book or a church-service book of some kind. Books were in his mind a necessity of church-going; but then he noticed that few of the congregation had books of any kind. Some of them were slowly passing strings of beads through their hands—another puzzle to him. Then a bell tinkled somewhere near the altar. Every head was bowed. A few of the men near him sank down till their foreheads nearly touched the matted floor. Again and again the bell rang, and he saw first the white host and then the golden chalice held up over the priest's head. Little as he knew of Catholic belief or practice, he had heard enough to realize that this was, for his friend beside him, for the kneeling congregation, for his affianced bride, the central act of Christian faith and worship. Indeed, he felt that, for all around, there was some adorable mystery before them in living reality, and that their

## THE RED CIRCLE

adoration was no mere ceremonial form, but the central fact of life; and as the chalice glittered in the sunlight his head was bowed with the rest almost involuntarily and with the vaguest sense of what he was doing.

Then there was silence again for a while. But in a few minutes he heard the voice of the priest for the first time repeating some prayer aloud. The bell rang again, and he saw the nuns and Edith and several of the native Christians rising from their places and going toward the altar. He looked at De Visser, and the Belgian caught his questioning glance, and whispered to him:

"We stay here. It is the Communion. The Mass will soon be over now."

He had been at the Communion service of the English Church, but that was something quite different from what he now saw. He watched the priest turn to the little crowd that had gathered about the altar rail, heard his voice repeating some form of words, and saw the people near him, at the lower end of the church, with bowed heads cross themselves and strike their breasts. Then the priest was moving backward and forward by the rail, and in the great silence he heard him saying again and again something in which the Holy Name always recurred; and the people were coming back one by one to their places. He saw Edith and the nuns rise and turn from the rail with bent heads; and then, as some of those who had knelt near him came back, he saw to his surprise that these native workmen and work-

## SUNSHINE AFTER STORM

women had an air of absorbed recollection, of absolute unconsciousness—a look of reverent awe in their faces that seemed for the moment to transfigure them.

In a few minutes more the priest turned and blessed the congregation, and all stood up. The last Gospel was read. The priest, with his white-surpliced server, a Chinese boy, left the altar, and many of the congregation rose to go. But others remained kneeling, and among them Edith and her companions. De Visser bent toward Marker and whispered:

“Mass is over. They will come out in ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. We can wait for them in the courtyard.”

But Marker replied:

“I would rather wait here, if I may.” And, to De Visser’s surprise, he continued kneeling.

Now here, now there, one or other of the native Christians rose and went away. At last he saw that the nuns and Edith were moving. De Visser stood up and genuflected. Marker followed his example, and they were in the courtyard when the nuns came out.

For Marker there was a moment of wondering anxiety. Would she be the same to him, or would there be some unseen barrier between them? Was it possible for her to pass so suddenly from mingling with such solemn mysteries back to the thoughts and words of everyday life? He had lurking in his mind the idea that religious people, or professors of religion, were apt to

## THE RED CIRCLE

affect a solemn coldness and stiffness to keep up the character; and the old prejudice half asserted itself. But it vanished when Edith's eyes met his with a glow of glad surprise. Her frank words of affectionate welcome were a new delight. And, to add to his pleasure, the Sisters at once invited him to come back with her to the convent for breakfast. De Visser made the excuse that he had to take the letters to Père de Kerouan and the Hendersons, and look through a great bundle of papers addressed to himself. Then the nuns went on together, leaving Marker and Edith to follow and have a talk on the way; and Edith heard that he had been in the church during the greater part of the Mass.

"You will tell me what it all means," he said. "Your religion will be mine. It is something real. It is not all talk and preaching. I can understand that much. You will teach me the rest."

. . . . .

So when, a week later, they stood together at the altar rail, and Père de Kerouan blessed their union, Edith had the happiness of knowing that she and her husband would profess the same faith. She had been ready for its sake to refuse his offered hand and heart, but the sacrifice had not been asked for. Instead of dividing them, her conversion was to draw them more closely together.

Later in the day, on the deck of the *Tai-shan*, she heard for the first time that her "castle in the

## SUNSHINE AFTER STORM

air" was taking solid shape. Henderson told her that, though nothing was yet certain, it was most likely that he would resign his post at the English mission, and revert to his first profession when he had qualified as a doctor before becoming a clergyman and a missionary; and that as a layman he would take charge of the new hospital of Cheng-foo.

That afternoon, when the Belgian engineers and the Hendersons went ashore, and the *Tai-shan* raised her anchor and steamed down the Yang-tse, the future looked as bright as the sunlit river. There would be other times of trial—Edith was wise enough to realize this, just as the broad stream on which she was voyaging again was broken miles away by more than one wild reach of swirling, roaring rapids. But she knew that if dark days should come, she could trust to the same overruling Providence that had brought so much of happiness for her out of the trials and sorrows of the past. There could hardly be again a more terrible time than the days of peril that had begun on the evening when poor Li-tsu told of the plot of the Red Circle, and was brought wounded and dying to her old home. But that night she had met Père Gratien, and from that moment had come the great change in her own life, with all its consequences to herself and others. She could already see that in the wild fury of the revolt, which was meant by its agents to destroy the missions of Cheng-foo, there had been the beginning of a brighter time, not for

## THE RED CIRCLE

herself only, but for the riverside town where she had lived so long and was now to make herself a new home. And she meant that her home should be a centre of help for the work that was being done among the poor people, for whom already, under other auspices, she had done so much, and whom she had learned to love. She knew that her husband would not thwart her generous purpose, and she hoped thus to repay some of the debt she owed to Père Gratien's memory.

THE END







